

“To begin the world over again”: National Security after the Age of Corona



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In the appendix to *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine wrote “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.” At the dawn of the American Revolution, Paine supported the impending break from Great Britain and encouraged the colonists to make the most of the freedom they were soon to receive. It was freedom that would change the world, as, over time, the United States served as a beacon of liberty for oppressed and enslaved people the world over.

Today, when some in the United States talk about re-making the world in a post-Corona age, they envisage radical change to the domestic social and economic systems. This, however, is unlikely to happen, despite the disturbingly increasing attraction some are having toward the so-called democratic socialists floating through the political scene.

By nature, the United States is largely an evolutionary, not a revolutionary country. We are fortunate that the one revolution – largely conservative by nature – did not turn into a massive post-victory blood sport like those in Russia, China, and elsewhere. When change is perceived as radical, largely because it happens with the support of only one political party, the political ramifications for that party and the nation can be severe, and the change remains largely unaccepted by many for generations. For things to work well in America, the country needs to be brought along *in toto*, and this takes time.

What is more likely to change rapidly, and, indeed, what must change rapidly are certain American approaches to national security policy, particularly toward her most troublesome adversaries: Russia and China. There are five key initiatives that can make this happen, some of which are very similar to those that were successful during the Cold War.

First, no one who does not have a serious and clearly articulated policy that regards both nations as chief adversaries should come near the Presidency of the United States.¹ The same goes with becoming President or Prime Minister of other democratic nations. The fact that there are some people, including politicians, Acela Corridor think tankers, and regular citizens who take the side of the CCP simply because they so detest President Trump is a testament to their lack of critical thinking skills. The April 2020 Asia Society letter is but one example of this.² It is hard to imagine that anyone involved in national security or foreign policy would have written such a letter regarding the USSR. After all, many Americans could readily agree that the Soviets were evil for invading Afghanistan and that something had to be done about it, while also regarding Jimmy Carter as an inept president. Both were true, and people could bridge that divide, regardless of party. Americans should be able to live in a country where they agree that the CCP and Vladimir Putin are horrible international actors and a threat to world stability, that the WHO, the UN, and other international organizations are poorly run and deeply corrupt, and that Donald Trump is unfit to be President.

Despite China's installation of fake islands in the South China Sea, its militarization of the region, the destruction of Tibetan culture, the imprisonment of millions of Uyghurs in concentration camps, organ harvesting, racist attacks on Africans throughout China,

¹ One current American politician has been on the right side of both of these issues. Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT) warned about Russia during the 2012 Presidential election, only to be mocked by President Obama and the press that supported him. He also warns about China in a recent *Washington Post* op-ed: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/mitt-romney-covid-19-has-exposed-chinas-utter-dishonesty/2020/04/23/30859476-8569-11ea-ae26-989cfce1c7c7_story.html.

² <https://asiasociety.org/center-us-china-relations/saving-lives-america-china-and-around-world>. Chiefly, this letter fails to acknowledge that the PPEs made in China that the signatories claim can be sent to the United States and elsewhere have been proven to be of such low quality that they are unusable, all while stating that American “shortcomings” must be addressed. Likewise, there is no acknowledgement of China's treatment of Dr. Li Wenliang, which calls into question whether any Chinese medical findings, including vaccine information, will be shared honestly and openly with the greater world. Equally troubling are Bill Gates's recent comments, asserting that criticism of China is a “distraction” from finding a cure to the Coronavirus.

the continuing Coronavirus cover-up, its deporting foreign reporters who dare to write honestly about China, rather than regurgitate CCP talking points, and Chinese diplomatic tweets that make Trump's most unhinged moments look almost tame in comparison³ show their true colors. At least the Soviets, as dour as they generally were, occasionally showed some sense of irony and humor, particularly when Vladimir Pozner spoke. The Chinese, as are Putin's Russians, are increasingly crass and cruel. Nevertheless, the large number of supporters China retains is testament either to a naivete amongst vast swaths of the "educated" establishment or the deep financial tentacles the CCP has used to grab and hold onto those in or seeking power. Very few who treated the Soviet Union in like fashion made the upper levels of political power in America, nor should they have; likewise, countries should be wary of electing officials who will not stand up to China.

It is thus noteworthy that while Trump pursues his bromance with Putin, there has been a strong, bipartisan domestic and international response to Putin's Russia by most of the democratic world for his invasion of Georgia, his invasion of Crimea, his continuing machinations in Eastern Ukraine, and his murder of Russians abroad. The same cannot be said for dealing strongly with China, which arguably presents a greater threat at the current time. We must also remember that one thing above all others kept the USSR in line: the thought that the democratic world would go to war with them. We must show both that we are serious about fighting them if need be, while doing all we can to avoid doing so.

Second, little in the international arena is possible without a strong set of allies and alliances. Trump has done this no favors by constantly bad-mouthing NATO, although he and other American presidents before him have made the valid point that many nations are not paying their promised amount. There is the additional concern that some NATO countries, such as Germany, which would be largely useless in a fight anyway, are prioritizing toadying up to China for their own economic benefit over larger security concerns. Their desire to use China's Huawei for their 5G networks also calls into question their commitment to international security. It will likely be up to an Anglo-Viking-Ninjasphere, which will bring together the Anglophone nations, the Scandinavian and Baltic nations,⁴ along with Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, to provide the core of an international security alliance. Other European nations, such as the Czech Republic, which has an appropriate low regard for Chinese interference, will also be

³ The best recent examples of this are China's threats toward Australia. Cheng Jingye, China's Ambassador to Australia, threatened to stop importing Australian beef and wine, while also curtailing tourist trips to Australia: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/covid-19-coronavirus-inquest-china-threaten-australia-boycott-12680112>. In addition, Hu Xijin, Editor of the *Global Times*, referred to Australia as "chewing gum stuck on the sole of China's shoe": <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/29/chewing-gum-stuck-on-the-sole-of-our-shoes-the-china-australia-war-of-words-timeline>.

⁴ Estonia, Norway, and Sweden, in particular, have attracted China's ire most recently: https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/05/07/whats-behind-chinas-new-behavior-in-europe-242529?fbclid=IwAR1wGVsZU-w-9RzHTOgx_Dy6oD19J8uHL2eX1J3_FS0OI81uhS8EU_64uc

welcomed, while India will play a key role in helping to secure the Indo-Pacific region. Together, this will allow the democratic world to contain both Russia and China, as the Soviet Union was contained in generations before. Such an alliance will also give a united voice to reforming large international organizations and obtaining key trading pacts, whether between individual nations, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, or fully engaging the TPP with the United States again a member. Some nations will rightly regard the United States with some wariness, particularly after the feckless Obama years and the chaotic Trump years. They should therefore be willing to step up themselves and take the lead in helping to secure their regions with other like-minded local partners, all as part of a greater international security initiative.

Third, immigration is always a valid national security concern, although not in the way that many make it to be. One of the ways the United States became and remained that beacon for freedom-seeking peoples the world over was through immigration policies that allowed others to come and forge new lives. This is now threatened in the Trump administration, while needed reforms have been ignored by both major parties. One serious proposal the United States should make law is to give foreign students who obtain an MA or PhD at a recognized, accredited college or university, regardless of field of study, an automatic pathway to a green card. Much like with the system of provisional green cards issued to foreigners who marry American citizens, they can be issued for two years initially, after which holders can apply for true permanent residency if they can show they have made a life here. Such a system shows a commitment to legal immigration, while giving some lip service to those who want to limit it to a points-based system, but herein allowing all advanced degree holders to remain. It also keeps the best and brightest in the United States, rather than educating them and promptly kicking them out.

This will also serve as a national security boon to the United States because, after a number of years, and on a regular cycle, there will be a corps of new American citizens, proficient in foreign languages and knowledgeable of their old home, who can explain it to their home. Some of those newly minted citizens will want to work in the national security apparatus, and they should be encouraged to do so. Opponents of this initiative will raise the risks of sleeper agents being put in place, but it is a long path from provisional green card to citizenship, which would be necessary to obtain the most secure jobs in the intelligence arena, and an even longer path to those positions. It is also important to point out to those critics that the most damaging spies in American history have been native-born Americans, including Aldrich Ames, Robert Hanssen, and the members of the Walker spy ring.

Fourth, during the Great Depression, FDR tackled unemployment by creating work programs. While again there is some talk about this, the focus should instead be on providing educational opportunities. In recent years critical areas of study have been increasingly avoided by American students, so now is exactly when Intelligence and Security Studies, broadly defined, but including the study of critical languages and

traditional area studies need to be promoted. This will help those who are temporarily unemployed by sending them back to school, paying them to learn, in full if they concentrate in obtaining critical national security skills. Those who have the requisite language and intercultural communication skills can be concurrently employed as counters to the Chinese *wumao* and Russian интернет-тролли, while those who have gained both language and appropriate computer skills can be part of a larger hacker corps who can aid in infiltrating Chinese, Russian, Iranian, North Korean and other adversarial computer systems, as those countries have been doing to the democratic world in recent years. The best hackers will even find ways to turn these nations against each other.

Fifth, the economic damage from the Coronavirus has already allowed university administrators to gut various academic programs, including some necessary ones, leaving many temporary and newly-hired faculty struggling to keep or find jobs. However, just as more students can be trained to work in the broader-defined national security communities, there can be a closer link between these educators and those communities, for the former know how to conduct in-depth research, with many also possessing valuable language skills. They can help provide needed outside perspectives. Following the model of the successful Team B initiative, led by Soviet specialist Richard Pipes, that dealt with Soviet weapons issues, a number of new such teams can be formed to look at a wide variety of international challenges with fresh eyes, while, closer to taking action, academics can also be brought in as “Red Team” members to play devil’s advocate before a mission is launched.

Critics of these initiatives will argue that these suggestions do not truly “begin the world over again” and simply return us to a Cold War footing. However, it retains the spirit of Thomas Paine’s conservative view toward the American Revolution in that it encourages us to maintain what has worked well, while changing that which has not. This takes the best of what won the West the Cold War and combines it with new initiatives to broaden the base from which America and other democratic nations can grow a new international security apparatus by involving more citizenry at every level. In turn, this will allow all freedom-loving nations to deal with the world as it is by being better educated and, thus, better prepared when it throws new challenges at us in the future.⁵

⁵ This is the fourth and final piece in my #CoronaQuarantine series of op-eds, all of which have touched in some way or another on the Coronavirus that originated in China and has since spread throughout the world, while also dealing with larger issues of national and international security. Everyone compelled to stay inside these last two months has had to find an outlet to keep themselves both grounded at home and involved in the outside world. Balanced with having to convert all my courses to online study rapidly, writing these pieces has been another way for me to feel like I am making a difference in the world. Such work has not been done in silence, and I’m grateful for all the artists who have made their works available for free – as SIA has these and other pieces – to the world during this time. Among these are the Dropkick Murphys, who was first in giving the world a St. Patrick’s Day concert, the Metropolitan Opera, which has offered a different opera online each night, the Pink Floyd YouTube channel, which has released a different concert each Friday, the Lumineers, who headlined a Colorado Gives Back concert, which has served as my listening music as this piece

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goes through its final edits, the International Spy Museum, which has provided a number of fascinating talks and useful information about valuable life skills, and my friend Consuelo Lepauw, who, while unable to return to Paris from her countryside visit before France completely locked down, has made me smile with her regular Instagram postings of her violin music. In the end, it's art that survives and endures, so we must always strive, as Neil Gaiman said, to "make good art." These pieces are mine from this time. I hope you have enjoyed them, or, even if you did not, that they have made you think.