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Epidemic of insanity strikes America's leaders

Biden administration is sleepwalking America into wars it can't feasibly win against Russia and China

by [Spengler](#) January 21, 2022

It must be a hitherto unreported side-effect of the Omicron strain, perhaps a malignant protein activated by the rays of the full moon. America's political class, Democrat and Republican alike, appear to have gone babbling, barking mad, starting with President Joe Biden, but afflicting his political opponents as well.

Biden's January 19 press conference drew pity from the global press, with verbal gaffes unlike anything that has escaped the mouth of an American president before. He predicted a Russian military move into Ukraine: "My guess is he will move in. He has to do something." Russia will be "held accountable if it invades," Biden said, but added, "It depends on what it does. It's one thing if it's a minor incursion and we end up having to fight about what to do and not do, et cetera."

A baffled reporter asked if he was giving Russia permission for a "minor incursion," and Biden dug himself in deeper: "If it's something significantly short of a significant invasion or not even significant — major military forces coming in...for example, it's one thing to determine that if they continue to use cyber efforts, we can respond the same way, with cyber...There are differences in NATO as to what countries are willing to do, depending on what happens. The degree to which they are able to go."

The White House press office spent the next several hours "clarifying" the "minor incursion" remark. The world simply concluded that Biden was senile.

Wrote Germany's center-right daily *Die Welt*: "Biden stumbled several times. He showed lack of concentration. He closed his eyes several times and stared at the ceiling to regain his concentration. After more than an hour of questions, he looked at his watch and asked the reporters, 'How much longer did you want to do this?'"

"It's obvious why the White House staff wants to put the president in front of a microphone as little as possible," *Die Welt* concluded.

What about the Republicans? Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared in an essay for [The National Interest](#) that the "United States and its allies must use the full spectrum of soft power to delimit and, in time, rupture Russia's relations with China."

Pompeo mentioned Russia's support for the Union during America's civil war and "shared sacrifices" in the war against Hitler. But he also declared that "America's affinities with the Russian people must not be subverted by kleptocratic elements within the Kremlin that seek power through volatility and subversion."

Added Pompeo: "Russia is fundamentally a European state: Moscow's future must not lie with China. A new relationship with Russia must be based on fairness, reciprocity, and an unceasing commitment to expose malevolence and corruption when expressed by that state."

The former top diplomat appears to be saying that the Russian and American people should unite against China by first eliminating the “kleptocratic” regime in the Kremlin, a statement that Russian President Vladimir Putin doubtless would interpret as a personal threat.

My Mike Pompeo secret decoder ring has gone missing, so I cannot provide a plain-text translation of Pompeo’s statement. I’m at a loss to understand it and suspect that I’m not alone in that predicament.

Nothing would be worse than Sino-Russian collaboration, Pompeo continued: “Russia and China are building dozens of nuclear power plants throughout the globe. These plants may serve as redoubts for Russian or Chinese forces, even as these nations conscript the elites of the developing countries in which they are built.”

Visions dance in Pompeo’s head, it seems, of commandos popping out of the containment structures of nuclear power plants in Turkey, Hungary and Belarus, where Russia is building plants. China has talked of building nuclear power plants overseas, but thus far has no overseas activity except for a 20% stake in a French project to build a facility in England, and probably will be excluded.

Pompeo’s last major action as a lame-duck Secretary of State after the November 2020 election was to remove the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) from the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations.

Beijing’s English-language daily [Global Times](#) denounced what it called Washington’s “repulsive practice of condoning terrorist groups.” It does not seem to have occurred to him that Russia has a proportionately larger Muslim minority than does China, nor that Russia crushed its restive province of Chechnya by killing perhaps 100,000 and displacing 500,000 of its 1.3 million people.

Russia and China suspect that Washington will direct jihadists against them. Several thousand Uighurs [fought in Syria](#) under the command of US-supported Sunni rebels. Some have returned to China, or to countries on China’s border. The Muslim issue—and suspicions of Washington’s exploitation of it—force Moscow and Beijing together. That’s why Putin sent his 6th Airborne to crush the revolt in Kazakhstan, and Beijing applauded.

China’s Muslim population is barely 25 million, or 1.7% of the population, but 10% of Russia’s population is Muslim. After America’s disorderly withdrawal from Afghanistan, the jihad threat to Central Asia has increased. Pompeo personally did more to provoke Chinese and Russian suspicions about American intentions in Central Asia than any US official since the 1980s. If the US wants to woo Russia, it should send someone else.

American strategists, meanwhile, are circulating scenarios for sea war with China. Former Pentagon planner Elbridge Colby, in a book I reviewed [January 17](#), proposes anti-access/area denial measures to prevent China from taking Taiwan by force, assuming—as I remonstrated—that China would sit on its hands and watch while the United States massively reinforced Taiwan’s defenses.

If China used force to prevent this and the US used force in return, China might use some of its estimated 1,300 intermediate-range anti-ship missiles to sink a US aircraft carrier. Some American strategists question whether China’s missiles could hit a moving ship in blue water. They should ask if that is harder than landing a spacecraft on the [dark side of the moon](#).

Colby, meanwhile, has endorsed a [Council on Foreign Relations paper](#) entitled “Enhancing US-Japan Coordination for a Taiwan Conflict,” by a twenty-something named David Sacks. Young Mr Sacks complains that “Taiwan has also too often failed to use its limited resources

wisely, prioritizing expensive legacy systems such as fighter jets, tanks, and large surface vessels over cheaper, more numerous weapons that can survive an initial PLA attack....the challenge for Taiwan is ensuring that these purchases do not crowd out the asymmetric tools such as missiles, drones, sea mines, and fast-attack ships that will be decisive during wartime."

It does not occur to him that Taiwan maintains a Potemkin Village army precisely in order *not* to give Beijing a reason to attack. Taiwan is the size of a single large Chinese city and stands 80 miles off China's coast. China maintains the status quo, namely the One China policy that presumes eventual reunification, and will view any attempt to make Taiwan impregnable as a repudiation of the One China policy—and exercise its option to take the island by force while it is still easy to do so.

Sacks hopes to enlist Japan in this effort. Japan may have other ideas, for example, building its own missiles, missile defenses and air superiority fighters and, in extremis, its own nuclear weapons. He proposes stockpiling large amounts of ammunition in Japan, on the premise that American soldiers might get close enough to the Chinese mainland to use artillery or small arms against the People's Liberation Army.

America's problem is simple: China's enormous missile force makes American carriers obsolete. Admiral (Ret) James Stavridis, the former commander of the US Pacific Fleet, sketches a scenario in his thriller "2034" book in which China sinks a US carrier and the US retaliates with a nuclear attack. China nukes a few US cities, and India mediates a ceasefire.

Stavridis' scenario is not far-fetched. Edward Luttwak, an estimable historian and military consultant, [tweeted](#) on January 19: "Every day I read fanciful China war scenarios. Some ignore the nuclear inhibition that protects vulnerable US aircraft carriers."

By "nuclear inhibition," Luttwak apparently means that if China were to sink a US fleet carrier, the United States would retaliate with nuclear weapons. Luttwak wrote a book-length study on China in 2013 for the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment, for which I also consulted at the time.

The madness of Luttwak's logic requires a brief pause and a deep breath to take in: He concedes that China has the capacity to destroy American ships, including carriers, with its massed missile forces, but asserts that China would refrain to do so out of fear of American nuclear retaliation.

None of the tit-for-tat in the South China Sea means anything: If the US Navy tries to stop China from seizing Taiwan, and China destroys US capital ships, we go straight to a nuclear exchange. In plain-text translation, this means the following: The United States cannot defend Taiwan by conventional means—not against 1,300 missiles on 350 launchers with ranges up to 3,200 kilometers, 60 very quiet submarines, hundreds of surface ships, the Russia-built and highly effective S-400 air defense system, and roughly 1,000 air superiority fighters.

China's warfighting capabilities, to be sure, are untested. Then again, US Navy personnel have displayed a miserable level of readiness recently, for example in the [Bonhomme Richard other recent naval disasters](#).

But China would be fighting on its coast with short logistical lines, and America would be attempting to project power 7,000 miles from San Diego. Any conflict therefore would instantly escalate to the level of nuclear exchange.

I think that the US defense establishment knows exactly what it is doing, although (apart from a few mavericks like Luttwak) it doesn't like to talk about it. It wasted US\$6 trillion in Iraq and Afghanistan and neglected high-tech R&D in critical fields such as hypersonic glide vehicles and missile defense.

The United States lost the Western Pacific when it decided to pursue the phantom of democracy in Mesopotamia and Central Asia rather than build a 21st-century defense, and the whole of the defense establishment signed on. That's where the money and promotions were.

Now that China's growing power exposes their incompetence, the establishment strategists will risk nuclear war with China to save their reputations.