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QUOTE FOR THE DAY

“Every solution to every problem is simple. It’s the distance between the two where the mystery lies.” Derek Landy, Irish author

AND, PROBLEMS WE HAVE

Democrat or Republican – pro Biden or anti Biden – we, and the country, are all in this together, and the Biden administration just has a host of problems; all at the same time.

On the domestic front we have the migration crisis and quelling the pandemic (just when statistics were looking better we are seeing large surges, especially in the mid west, due to the Covid 19 variant.)

Then there is the effort to enact three to four trillion dollars worth of infrastructure and individual assistance programs that is mired

in debate over the scope. The latest conflict is over semantics, with the liberals redefining what the word infrastructure means. To them, it means absolutely everything: hard physical projects (bridges, roads, piping); my priorities, I prefer to call it Human Capital (schools, health care, better housing and recreational facilities in our disadvantaged cities) and Climate (everything green). In short- a total rebuild of America. It's no wonder that so many independents and Republicans are supportive. These are all great ideas, but a massively bigger project than the three to four trillion dollars being currently discussed. The Republicans rightly point out, that even those levels of expenditures can't be paid for by increasing corporate taxes to 28% and increasing personal taxes on people making more than \$400,000. In short, the progressive democrats eyes are excessively bigger than their stomachs.

On top of all that, the president is feeling great pressure from the progressive wing of the party to pack the Supreme Court, do away with the filibuster and make D.C. a state.

That's enough to fill anyone's plate. However, major problems are facing the U.S. off shore. We touched on Iran and Afghanistan in the last issue and will discuss more in further ones, but do have to note, that just three days after the last HH issue, when I wrote of Mossad's (the Israeli intelligence agency) past successes in crippling Iran's nuclear development program, they did it again, throwing the negotiations for the U.S. to reenter the Iranian nuclear deal into a muddle. Hard to believe that our closest ally (Israel) didn't tell us in advance.

The focus today is old problems with China and Russia that have become new problems in recent days, as it appears both countries are trying to see how far they can push the Biden administration. They seem to be attempting to determine if they are dealing with a kindly Neville Chamberlain type, or someone who will draw a line in the sand and back it up.

RUSSIA: A little background. In 1783 the Crimea was traded to Russia by the Ottoman empire. In the wake of the Russian Revolution and the birth of the USSR, Ukraine was absorbed as a member state (Think Texas as

part of the U.S.) While economically and militarily important, the Crimea, being in physical proximity to Ukraine, it only made sense to the Russians to have Crimea be part of Ukraine. After all, they were one big happy family.

Fast forward to 1991 and the break up of the USSR, Ukraine declared its independence. With a population of 1.9 million, the Crimea has 1.5 million people who identify themselves as Russians. In 2014 the Russians said, in effect, “We’ll take our Crimea back, thank you very much”, and the region was militarily annexed to the howls of the free world. There were some sanctions thrown around and certain Russian officials declared persona non grata in the U.S. Mr. Putin just stood his ground and, today, Crimea, with all its Russian citizenry is very much a part of Russia.

Not long after the annexation, two other Ukrainian districts, in the south and east of Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk) became the center of a separatist movement. With more than 50% of the population of these two districts speaking Russian, the separatists

mounted a military campaign in an effort to divorce themselves from Ukraine.

Mr. Putin's forces have watched this action over the past several years and are known to have given some, not so secret, assistance.

Moving to more recent times, in a March 18th interview Mr. Biden was asked if he thought Mr. Putin was a killer. He responded, "Mmm hmm, I do." Gotta be careful there, Mr. president, the U.S. is not exactly blameless in extra judicial "terminations with extreme prejudice", ie. Assassinations, and it's not cool for heads of state to be calling each other murderers.

The Russians were furious with Mr. Kosachev, head of the Russian Foreign Affairs Committee saying, "Any expectation for the new administration's new policy toward Russia have been written off by this boorish statement." It can be assumed that Mr. Putin filed this in his "people to get even with" box. Didn't take long at all for Mr. Putin to react. As reported in the NY Times on April 10th, Russia has, over several weeks, amassed a

huge military presence on Ukraine's border. "Armored personnel carriers bristling with weapons, line a highway in southern Russia. Rows of tanks are parked by major roads. Heavy artillery is transported by train; the largest deployment of Russian forces towards Ukraine in seven years."

Analysts aren't certain why the build up, but Putin has previously expressed concern for the Russian speaking citizens in eastern Ukraine to whom the Russians have been granting dual citizenship since 2019. Another invasion and land grab like the Crimea, who knows? And, what strong actions will Mr. Biden take to prevent it? It will be too late if Mr. Biden waits until the Russians cross the border to, "draw a line in the sand."

CHINA: David Leonhardt writes in the NY Times, "When Henry Kissinger secretly travelled to China in 1971, he came bearing multiple requests- about Vietnam, nuclear arms and the Soviet Union. His counterpart, Zhou Enlai, had only one focus, Taiwan."

Out of those negotiations came the agreement that the U.S. would recognize the government in Beijing, not Taipei. The U.S. did not abandon Taiwan, however, continuing to sell them armaments and implicitly warning Beijing not to invade. This policy called, “Strategic ambiguity” has been in place ever since.

In their immediate sphere of geographic influence, in recent years China can best be described as a python gradually choking its victims in Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang. Taiwan remains, “the only part of greater China outside of Beijing’s grip. China’s current leaders view Taiwanese reunification much as Mr. Zhou did in 1971: urgent and vital.”

Coming back to the U.S. view, “Many U.S. officials and foreign policy experts worry that it (strategic ambiguity) has become outdated. They think that president Biden may need to choose between making a more formal commitment to Taiwan’s defense or tempting China to invade.”

Ms. Bonnie Glaser, a top strategist on China, says of top U.S. officials, “I think people are

bending over backwards to say to China, ‘Do not miscalculate- we strongly support Taiwan.’” She goes on to point out, however, that a more explicit U.S. commitment could provoke China, a possible miscalculation on our part. “Maybe, then, Xi is backed into a corner. This could really cause China to make the decision to invade.”

It is conjectured that a concrete American security guarantee could embolden Taiwan to declare independence. China’s Defense Minister, Wu Qian says, “Taiwan independence means war.”

In the meantime, further testing the new administration, China is repeatedly invading Taiwan’s air space with fighter planes and menacing behavior with warships near Taiwan. I sure don’t think we want to be going to war in China’s back yard – the supply lines get a little long. My unrequested advice, Mr. President, is that a continuation of, “Strategic ambiguity” sounds pretty good.

CARBON FOOTPRINTS – I DIDN’T KNOW THAT

Hey, all you Bitcoin lovers, you're trashing the world. Turns out that bitcoin uses more electricity than any other method known to mankind. 735,121 visa transactions are needed to equal one bitcoin deal in carbon emitted. Well, that's outrageous, until bitcoin defenders point out that the average bitcoin transaction is \$16,000, while the average Visa transaction is \$46.37. OK, that brings the comparison down from the outrageous to the merely unacceptable. Accounting for the difference in transaction sizes, bitcoin is a 2,130 times greater carbon emitter than Visa.

So now I'm supposed to curtail my fish intake because it's hurting carbon levels? Yes, indeed, no more shrimp, whiting, cod and other fish caught mainly by trawling for our climate concerned readers. According to an article by Catrin Einhorn, "Scientists have calculated how much planet-warming carbon dioxide is released into the ocean by bottom trawling along the ocean floor. The answer is: as much as global aviation releases into the air. Sorry folks, on that one, I'm just incredulous. When John Kerry stops taking private jets, I'll reduce my fish intake to once a week.

TULIP MANIA REDUX

For those of us who haven't read the story, suggest you look it up. In short, in the early 1600s the recently introduced tulips became so sought after in Holland that the price of a single bulb exceeded that of an average home. In an updated version, we now have Nonfungible Tokens(NFTs), the hottest craze in cryptocurrency. Using blockchain technology, digital works can be created that are absolutely unique and the original cannot be copied. According to Kevin Roose, "Some NFT collectors believe that owning early crypto art will be like owning rare first edition books..." As a test, he created a digital article on NFTs and put it up for auction hoping he might get \$1,000. Final sales price, \$560,000. Cada minuto nace otro bobo- translation - every minute another sucker is born.

Your faithful scribe, PB

