



Instead of Transcending Tyranny, the “New Right” Wants to Learn from It

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Few things unite the political Right in America as strongly as concern over the malign activities of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). From the elite capture of Washington politicians to depleted Rust Belt communities, conservatives of all stripes now recognize the threat the CCP poses to the American homeland. For some on the Right, however, that concern stops at the water's edge.

When news broke four months ago about the People's Republic of China's (PRC) latest hypersonic missile test, public intellectual Sohrab Ahmari fired a broadside against “a mindless China hawkishness.” He also wrote dismissively of the Uyghur genocide and the CCP's crackdown in Hong Kong. In December, when the People's Liberation Army sent numerous aerial sorties into Taiwan's air-defense identification zone, former Trump White House official Michael Anton publicly argued that it was “clearly” not in America's interest to defend Taiwan. As speculation swirled that same month about the disappearance of Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai, Harvard legal scholar Adrian Vermeule promoted CCP propaganda on his Twitter account touting her supposed safety.

These positions represent a stark break from conservative foreign policy. Recall Ronald Reagan's clarion call the last time the United States faced a great power adversary: “The West will not contain Communism, it will transcend Communism.” Today, however, this new cohort is apparently “at peace with a Chinese-led 21st century.”

Making sense of this seismic shift begins with understanding the true nature of the “New Right.” By their own admission, it is not a conservative project. Consider these words from Hillsdale College assistant professor David Azerrad:

However much we may long for a return to constitutional government, the modern administrative-welfare state is here to stay... The right must be comfortable wielding the levers of state power. And it should emulate the Left in using them to reward friends and punish enemies (within the confines of the rule of law).

The parenthetical qualifier is doing some heavy lifting. Don't miss the bombshell: an increasingly coherent and organized faction of erstwhile conservatives believe there is nothing left in America to conserve. The New Right is not only resigned to live in a post-constitutional regime, but is also eager to control that regime and impose their preferred outcomes. As Azerrad contends, “The conservative project in America today is fundamentally a counterrevolutionary one.”

So, what are post-conservatives fighting for? They talk often of the “common good”—by which they mean, among other things, breaking up Big Tech monopolies, pulling out of international bodies like the World Trade Organization, and revitalizing the American heartland—a decidedly nationalist agenda. Some of their aspirations are noble—particularly their emphasis on rebuilding American families and communities.

But if human dignity motivates their newfound interest in state power, why are they looking to tyrannical regimes for inspiration? During a live broadcast in August, FOX News TV host Tucker Carlson praised China's national unity as something America “could actually learn from them.” The following month, he took the unusual step of praising the CCP for doing “something virtuous”—namely, curtailing housing speculation, curbing celebrity idolization, and capping time allotment for video games.

What Tucker left unsaid was how Beijing plans to implement these measures. The Chinese people live under a brutal dictatorship that imposes its will through intimidation, surveillance, and violence. The CCP's political means are abhorrent, but according to Tucker's monologue, the political ends are “virtuous.”

In truth, this Machiavellian instinct has been brewing in the New Right for several years. Recall Michael Anton's infamous “Flight 93” essay in 2016, in which he compared the possibility of a Hillary Clinton presidency to the death of America. In such moments, storming the cockpit is not only necessary, but heroic. And when you're storming your own country's cockpit, you have no time to worry about Taipei, let alone Kyiv—especially when the dictators threatening those capitals are your source of political inspiration.

The New Right cannot be bothered with foreign threats because they are rationing political capital for an ideological fight at home. That's bad enough. Even worse, they seem less interested in transcending tyranny and more interested in learning from it.

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