

## Kabul: the harbinger of western decline or the catalyst for Trump's return

[Alan Moran](#)

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*Getty Images*

Recently revealed from the fall of Afghanistan is that President Obama exchanged Kairullah Khaikhwa, the public face of the Taliban leadership, along with four other jihadists for Bowe Bergdahl, a United States soldier turned traitor. One interpretation of this deal is that it stemmed from Obama's political naivete, or even contempt for his own nation.

An alternative view is that the deal was the action of an imperious grandee confident that a benevolent gesture to a conquered backward adversary would do no harm. The latter interpretation is consistent with that of a woke administration that trumpets its cultural sensitivity but flies the rainbow flag on the US Embassy in Kabul. To the 95% of Afghans who despise the idea of homosexuality, let alone any alphabet soup of non-traditional sexuality, this would have been seen as a deliberately contemptuous imposition of American cultural values.

Those cultural values have seriously infected the American military, now led by generals who appear to rate vocal sensitivity to the permanently offended above fighting skills. This and inept political leadership have now handed hundreds of billions of dollars of military equipment to the Taliban and hence the technology it incorporates to other adversaries, notably China.

Six months ago, the Biden Administration was confident that a US-backed Afghanistan with its 300,000 strong well equipped armed forces complete with tanks and air support would prevail in contesting territory with a 75,000 strong rag-tag rebellion. The Biden confidence swiftly changed to projecting a three-month hold-out, which took just a week to eventuate.

Such massive intelligence and military failures can only drain our confidence in US prognostications covering a broader canvas. Three years ago, the commander-in-chief of US Pacific forces, [Admiral Dennis Blair](#), declared to the approval of the Brookings Institution, that China will not represent a serious strategic threat to the United States for at least twenty years.

Sure, China's military spending of \$224 billion is dwarfed by the \$778 billion (40 per cent of the world total) the US spends and

is, by most accounts, outclassed in technology. But such assessments are contested. Thus, the defence website [Military Direct](#) already places China as more powerful than the US and, as the fall of Kabul shows, equipment is not everything.

China is showing a growing belligerence and self-confidence exemplified by constant probing of the defences of Taiwan and Japan, aggressive island-building in the South China Sea, its Belt and Road foreign funding program, as well as a willingness to punish US allies like Australia who lecture it on political matters.

In achieving its present economic stature, China seems to have resolved the “agency” problem which plagues the achievement of economic efficiency when government directions loom large in commercial decision making. Within China’s fast-growing economy there is at least 40 per cent of production under government ownership, while private industry also takes more directions from the government than is evident in conventional market economies. China’s post-1975 eight per cent annual growth means it is now 50 times greater in size than in 1975 and will overtake the US (with its two per cent historical growth rate) later this decade — a year or so earlier if it absorbs Taiwan.

In the all-important area of energy, China mouths diplomatic obeisance to the west’s high priests of climate change, while recognising that the transformation of the world from poverty has taken place only in the past 250 years and has been due to coal, oil and gas replacing human and animal muscle power. China will soon have 3,000 coal-fired power stations (Australian government policies are forcing the closure of our 60 remaining ones), with the steady increase in their numbers having comprised the backbone of the nation’s transformation from an industrial minnow to hosting half the world’s manufacturing.

By contrast, the West continues to self-harm with massive, wasteful government spending and a policy of dismantling its vital energy infrastructure. The myth shared by all too many politicians and business leaders is that a market induced “energy transition” is underway. The perception is that low cost, reliable electricity generated by wind and solar will replace dinosaur fossil fuel plants and old-fashioned petrol-powered vehicles. In reality not one megawatt of wind or solar energy has been built anywhere in the world without a subsidy.

Ominous in this regard is the Biden Administration’s “Build back better” infrastructure program. Within this \$4.5 trillion of new spending, only 15 per cent is allocated to roads and other growth facilitators (as opposed to sums earmarked for climate change agendas, as well as pensions, social housing and so on).

By directing expenditures away from growth-inducing areas and by increasing taxes on profits, the infrastructure tax-and-spend program will add to other wealth suppressing measures. These include terminating work on the pipeline from Canada, introducing new regulations to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, and closing federal lands to new oil, gas and coal leases (including those with potentially massive oil reserves in Alaska).

On Hannity yesterday Donald Trump virtually announced he will run for President in 2024, adding that it was not yet possible to formally declare his candidacy because of US electoral laws. That is about the best news we’ve had from the US for some time. The downside is that three years from now may be too late to save the US economy and nullify its political epitaph, “harmless as an enemy, treacherous as a friend”, coined by Bernard Lewis and recalled by Mark Steyn.