

Joe Biden's Democracy Gaffe

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It does not pay to be too moralistic in politics. Self-elevation can lead to tripping up. Sermonising even as your stable needs cleaning can enfeeble the argument. But Bidenism, this gaffe-prone ideology currently doing the rounds in a barely breathing administration, has identified the simplest of binaries to work with.

In his [State of the Union address](#), US President Joe Biden took the slicer to the world of politics and placed them into two tidy camps in a tradition that would have impressed the Bolshevik ideologue, Andrei Zhdanov. "In the battle between democracy and autocracy, democracies are rising to the moment, and the world is clearly choosing the side of peace and security."

In this supposed morality tale and cartoon strip, the wicked Russian autocrat Vladimir Putin does battle with the heroic democracy that is Ukraine, all simplified into roles where virtue combats satanic vice. There is no room for debate, for contrast, for history. Awkward realities are never allowed to intrude.

Putin, Biden insisted, "sought to shake the foundations of the free world, thinking he could make it bend to his menacing ways." The President, in contrast, had been busily building "a coalition of freedom-loving nations" across Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa to oppose that man in the Kremlin. Like a student proffering a glowing report card, Biden spoke of spending "countless hours unifying our European allies."

This child-in-cradle view of the world was not going to go down well with other powers. Leaving aside Putin as the feted gargoyle of tyranny, such talk about autocracy and democracy jars in a good number of countries. A few see themselves as US allies. It would have made the eyes of Egypt's strongman President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi, roll. It would have caused members of the House of Saud more than a bit of irritation, even if Biden has [failed to make good](#) an election promise to reassess Washington's relationship with the bone saw butchers in Riyadh.

In Warsaw, on March 26, the US President [was at it again](#), adding a few more streaky

remarks about this “dictator bent on rebuilding an empire”. This time, he went just that bit further. “For God’s sake, this man cannot remain in power.” When stated in a country increasingly gagging to get at Russia in whatever way it can short of total war, this was imprudent. Biden may well have said one thing, but he was also telling Poland, a NATO ally, that it could not ship MiG-29 jets to the Ukrainians.

A sweat might have also broken across the brows of those in the Pentagon. The US military [is confident](#) that Putin, if placed in a situation of being directly threatened, might resort to the nuclear option. It did not impress French President Emmanuel Macron, [who stated](#) in response that, “We want to stop the war that Russia launched in Ukraine, without waging war and without escalation.” Biden’s coalition of freedom lovers suddenly seemed rocky.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was left with the task of qualifying and unscrambling. No, the United States did not, he claimed in a [press conference](#) on March 27, “have a strategy of regime change in Russia or anywhere else, for that matter. In this case, as in any case, it’s up to the people of the country of question. It’s up to the Russian people.”

This astonishing analysis, so separated from the truth of US foreign policy over the years, glossed over the invasion of Afghanistan to oust the now returned Taliban (that regime change went so well); the open endorsement of Juan Guaidó’s leadership credentials in Venezuela against the established government; military assistance to rebel factions in Libya and, as a consequence, the public mauling and murder of long-time leader Muammar Gaddafi and his country’s de facto partition; and that real treat of an effort: the invasion of Iraq and the eventual capture and execution of Saddam Hussein.

Blinken’s summation is particularly rich given Washington’s own meddling in Ukrainian-Russian affairs. Such conduct seemed animated by a notion held by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger: democracy is only good for a country so long as it returns the right candidate. Falling short, Washington should provide a correcting hand.

One happy to offer that helping hand was Victoria Nuland, famed for her [“Fuck the EU” call](#) with US ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, in February 2014. It is telling that she is currently Biden’s Undersecretary for Political Affairs. As Assistant Secretary of State, Nuland shamelessly contemplated Arseniy Yatsenyuk as Washington’s replacement for the elected Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich. Three weeks later, the pro-Russian Yanukovich was ousted.

Umbrage was also taken with the European Union’s partiality towards former heavyweight boxer Vitaly Klitschko as prime ministerial material. “I don’t think Klitsch should go into the government,” a snootily dismissive Nuland told Pyatt. “I don’t think it’s necessary, I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

With such machinations exposed, US officials can be [safely saddled with responsibility](#) for overthrowing an elected government (democracy, but just the wrong sort) and aiding to precipitate a civil war that saw the deaths of 13,000 people, impoverished a country, and laid the seeds of sorrow that are now returning a terrible harvest.

Troublingly, Biden’s amnesiac coverage of the issues has found an audience. The reaction to his Warsaw gaffe in some quarters was far from negative. It took only a few days for the *New York Times* to [feature a letter](#) from one Tomasz Kitlinski of Lublin in Poland, who was delighted at the suggestion of ridding the world of Putin. The President “was absolutely

correct and doesn't need diplomatic sophistries to defend his discourse."

Another [letter](#) in the same column showed the danger of such rhetoric, the put-your-money-where-your-mouth-is school of thinking. "President Biden states that Vladimir Putin 'cannot remain in power'," writes Richard Kooris of Austin, Texas, "and yet he refuses to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine or allow Poland to make MiG-29 fighter jets available to Ukraine, ostensibly out of fear of igniting a wider (or nuclear) conflict."

The general tone of the readership, at least those pruned from the email stash sent to the Gray Lady, suggested that Biden was merely uttering the truth, gaffe or otherwise. Edward Luce, in the *Financial Times*, [suggested](#) that the Warsaw stumble was revealing, in so far as it was "hard to picture the circumstances in which the US would reincorporate Russia into the global economy while Putin is still there." The only question remains how far Washington will go to make matters worse, scuttling the prospects of a durable, realistic peace between Kyiv and Moscow.

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