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Biden is now a Lost Cause

By Gwynne Dyer

It really doesn't matter whether Joe Biden is in peak condition intellectually during a second term as president. He did some useful things in his first term, but his main job now is to stop Donald Trump from coming back. If he succeeded in doing that and went gaga immediately afterwards, the ship of state would carry on regardless.

However, in the view of half the US population and of almost everybody else in the world except the Russians and their friends, a Trump victory in November would hole that ship below the waterline. Vengeful, anti-democratic, and now endowed with full immunity from the law by a loyal Supreme Court, Trump would wreak havoc both at home and abroad.

Trump often loses the thread of his argument too, but that's irrelevant. Politics is all about perceptions, and the only perception that matters at the moment is that of Biden's apparent decline, because he's the one who had the ?elder moment'.

We all lose some cognitive function if we live long enough, but when and how much is a lottery. Most of us know people who are already losing it in their mid-70s, and others who are still lucid and fully functional in their mid-90s. What we do know, however, is that it rarely goes from bad to better.

It is people's automatic, almost unconscious assumption that if you had one ?bad day', like Joe Biden's nationally televised ?bad day' on 27 June, then you will have more of them in the future, and more frequently as time goes on. There are many exceptions to this assumption, but it's what usually happens.

So Biden's halting delivery, his moments of confusion, his simply blanking out on several occasions on that one day set the doubts about his mental fitness in motion. Everything he says and does from now on will be closely examined for evidence that his functioning is impaired.

If they are looking for it, they will find it. If your behaviour or mine were under that kind of scrutiny, they would note the momentary hesitation while we look for a word, and the time when we start a sentence that doesn't quite reach its intended destination. They will take it at best as further cause for concern; at worst as evidence that we are losing our marbles.

The drip-feed is the killer. Each ?gaffe' on its own is minor, but without an autocue Biden now often serves up a word salad. Take the 48 hours of Thursday and Friday, 4 and 5 July.

Speaking to WURD radio in Philadelphia, he said: ?By the way, I'm proud to be, as I said, the first vice-president, first black woman...to serve with a black president. Proud to be involved of the first black woman on the Supreme Court.?

Then George Stephanopoulos of ABC News, interviewing Biden in Madison, Wisconsin on Friday, asked him how he would feel if he remained the Democratic presidential candidate and lost the election to Donald Trump. That's a question with no good answer, like ?Have you stopped beating your wife?', but here's how Biden replied:

?I'll feel that as long as I gave it my all and I did the goodest job as I know I can do, that's what this is about.?

NO! That's NOT ?what this is about?. Never mind the child-like use of ?goodest' for ?best'. The candidate's job is to stop Trump. If Biden is not up to that task, the fact that he gave it his all and feels good about it will be no consolation whatever.

And then Stephanopoulos asked him if he had actually seen the video of the debate. After a pause Biden said ?I don't think I did.? That may be true, because one can imagine his family and close advisers shielding him from it to spare him the humiliation. If that's the case, they are not doing him a favour, because everybody else has.

The bad news for Joe Biden is that there is no ?off' switch for this process. He is now damaged goods electorally, although nobody can calculate exactly what discount is being applied to his electoral value by various groups of voters.

It is therefore entirely reasonable for the Democratic Party to consider changing its presidential candidate while there's still time. None of the plausible alternative candidates is currently riding much higher in the polls than Biden himself, but none of them will face the unstoppable erosion of confidence that now accompanies Biden's campaign.

The change may well come by quiet intra-party negotiations in the next ten days. If not, one or more rival candidates will certainly make a last-ditch attempt to sideline Biden at the Democratic Convention late next month. Miss both of those exits, and it will probably be Trump's Second Coming.

Pity has no place in politics. The stakes are too high.