

Lucky Joe Biden

by GWYNNE DYER

Joe Biden is thrice-blessed. Not only did he win the Democratic nomination and then the presidential election, but as a result of the events of 6 January he takes office when the Republican opposition is in utter disarray and likely to stay that way for a long time. None of that was foreordained, or even very likely.

?Just days ago the media and the pundits had declared this candidacy dead,? Biden marvelled almost exactly a year ago after winning the South Carolina primary election by a landslide. It had been dead, too, until African-American voters in South Carolina gave him their overwhelming support.

It was the first primary he had won, and it put him back in the race. Two days later Biden won ten out of 14 states on Super Tuesday and practically wrapped the nomination up. But if South Carolina had scheduled its primary even a few days later, he would have gone into Super Tuesday as a ?loser?, and probably been written off.

So, he got lucky once, but it was a bad year for a Democrat to be running for the presidency. Donald Trump was mocked and loathed by the rest of the world and by almost exactly half the US population, but Trump's ?base? didn't care and the US economy was in excellent shape.

The US media were doing their best to make the presidential race look exciting, because that's what they were going to have to talk and write about through most of 2020. But the fact is that incumbent US presidents running for re-election when the economy is good almost always win.

Biden's second stroke of luck came just ten days before he won the South Carolina primary, when the first case of COVID-19 showed up in the United States. By March, it was running wild, but Trump, aware that his re-election depended on a booming economy, avoiding taking any public health measures that would slow it down.

Other populist leaders did the same. Boris Johnson has been a week or two late on every pandemic-related decision, and Britain's per capita COVID death toll is even worse than America's. Bolsonaro in Brazil downplayed the COVID threat, as did Orban in Hungary, and their people paid a high price too. But none of them were running for re-election in 2020.

Trump's refusal to back anti-COVID measures like stay-at-home orders was driven more by electoral concerns than ideology: stall the economy and he could lose the election. But, of course, mass death will also stall the economy in the end, so he couldn't win. He ended up with a crashed economy, 400,000 COVID deaths, and a lost election, too.

And then, incredibly, he gave Biden another gift: the assault on the Capitol by his followers two weeks ago.

Biden was facing a grim time in office, with at least 70% of Republican voters and a majority of Republicans in the House of Representatives seduced by Trump's Big Lie that he really won the election by a landslide, and that the Democrats had somehow ?stolen? it.

That is what Biden faced only two weeks ago: a nightmare time in office with the ?Big Lie? rampant and Trump its proud purveyor. And then, suddenly, Trump, in his manic determination to hold onto power, sent his mob off to try a foredoomed coup in the ?Temple of Democracy?, as American commentators pompously call it. End of game.

Trump is discredited even with a modest but significant proportion of his own base, and a growing number of Republican office-holders are in rebellion against the party's subservience to the Tangerine Tyrant. Biden's years in office will be enlivened by a vicious Republican civil war, quite likely ending in a permanent split on the American right.

Which will give Lucky Joe time to do some useful stuff.