

Electing to go soft on democracy could send the U.S. into a spiral

In political circles, there is an expression that a conservative is a liberal who's just been mugged.

The corresponding rejoinder is the remark that a liberal is a conservative who's just been arrested.

For impartial observers, there may be a whole lot of truth in both statements, which largely explains the dilemma the country is facing as various factions grapple with the question of whether the U.S. is going soft on defending democracy.

On the other hand, there can be little doubt about the fortitude that the people of Ukraine are showing in defense of freedom and liberty as they continue to repel Russian invaders in a series of battlefield victories over the past few weeks.

Their resilience is a shining example of the strength of a country united by a common purpose and should inspire those concerned about the future of democracy not only in the U.S., but also in nations around the globe.

Russia's recent military setbacks have forced the hand of its dictatorial head Vladimir Putin, who last week ordered the mobilization of 300,000 reservists in an effort to stem the losses he also has suffered on the political and economic fronts. Putin's conscription drive has sparked protests across Russia in a rare show of defiance against his totalitarian regime.

The widespread outcry comes in a country where the Kremlin has mostly criminalized dissent, threatening opponents of the war in Ukraine with

long-term imprisonment for voicing their displeasure. Putin's mobilization plan also has reportedly sparked a mass exodus of military-age men, prompting miles-long lines of vehicles at checkpoints along the southern border of Russia.

The current chaos engulfing the former Warsaw Pact country coincides with large-scale and deadly protests in cities across Iran, another autocratic state that is known for crushing political dissent.

The fury in Iran was sparked by the mysterious death on September 16 of a 22-year-old Kurdish woman who was taken into custody by the so-called "morality police" for allegedly violating the Islamic Republic's strict rules requiring women to cover their hair and to wear loose-fitting clothing in public.

The international backlash against the heavy-handed approach by the two countries should be viewed as an encouraging sign that support is still strong for those who believe in democratic rule. Yet, support is tenuous at best, most notably in the U.S., which continues to be beset by various political groups determined to undermine our constitutional republic, particularly the right to hold free and fair elections.

The gravest threat to our democratic institutions is posed by those unwilling to accept the results of the 2020 presidential election coupled with the possibility that a number of those election-deniers will be voted into state and federal office in the November 8 midterm races. If that does indeed



happen, then we have sown the seeds of democracy's collapse, a disastrous fate that we tempted once already on January 6, 2021 at the Capitol insurrection.

That upheaval, which eventually claimed the lives of five police officers and injured more than 150 other law enforcement personnel, was fueled by the country's foremost election-denier – the then-president – who took a lead role in inciting the mob that ransacked the Capitol. On that same afternoon, he further stained one of our nation's darkest days by posting a video message on social media, telling the rioters to "go home, we love you, you're very special."

So special that upward of 350 rioters have pleaded guilty to assaulting police officers and/or destroying government property, and more than 200 reportedly have been sentenced to jail time and ordered to pay fines as restitution for their misdeeds. Prosecutors estimate that more than 2,000 people who took part in the rampage could ultimately be charged.

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Ironically, the crimes that were committed that day have been given new life by those who show fealty to a disgraced former president, someone who has made a habit of talking tough on crime only to be caught in the crosshairs of a series of state and federal investigations that could land him squarely behind bars.

But those are stories for another day.

What counts now is the need to safeguard our democracy by supporting candidates who embrace bipartisan efforts to strengthen the right to vote and who believe in the importance of preserving our most precious freedoms. Otherwise, the tragedies currently unfolding in Ukraine, Russia, and Iran may well play out on a stage much closer to home.

Best regards,

Jack Buchanan, President