

## Carl Golden: It's a pity they can't both lose

Carl Golden

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**W**hen the Iran-Iraq war broke out in 1980, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger opined on the hostilities this way: “It’s a pity they can’t both lose.”

With the presidential election less than four months off, a frustrated American electorate views it in the same fashion Kissinger viewed the war.

While President Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden have both adopted a campaign strategy that can loosely be described as “Vote for me because I’m not him,” voter enthusiasm has waned, replaced by a plaintive “is this the best we can do” plea.

The nation is faced with choosing between an incumbent president leading an increasingly dysfunctional White House and a challenger sequestered in his bunker/basement, straying out infrequently never more than one hundred miles or so from home.

Both campaigns have been defined by a lethal pandemic sweeping the nation, sickening some 3.6 million, proving fatal to nearly 150,000, sending unemployment levels to record highs, crashing the economy, destroying businesses and dramatically altering everyday life in America.

Trump’s response to the most serious public health crisis in over a century has been less than compelling. He’s casually dismissed the pandemic, predicted it would quickly fade, suggested a vaccine will soon be available, blamed governors for failing to control the spread of the virus and trafficked in bizarre conspiracy theories about its origins and who is responsible.

As the cruise ship slowly slips beneath the waves, Trump is standing on the promenade deck bragging about his shuffleboard score.

While he praises his administration's record in dealing with crisis, two White House aides – neither of whom possess any background or expertise in public health – publicly trash Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and a member of the White House coronavirus task force.

In campaigns and government, one of the unbreakable rules is “Don't step on your own story.” Translation: Deliver your message and say or do nothing to undercut it. Trump has repeatedly not only stepped on his own story, he's stomped on it with both feet until it's an unrecognizable mess and then assails the media for covering his actions as “fake news.”

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Meanwhile, Biden, safely cloistered (hiding, say his critics) at home, has ventured out in public in tightly controlled appearances, deeply sensitive to a propensity to misspeak or appear befuddled when his train of thought derails.

His campaign periodically issues position papers notable more for vague generalities and uplifting phraseology about the national utopia that awaits a Biden presidency. His close advisors fret about the incoming fire from the far left, ultra-progressive wing of the Democratic Party while seeking common ground to either bring them aboard or, at the very least, mute their rhetoric.

His message? If not me, you get Trump. “Vote for me because I'm not him.”

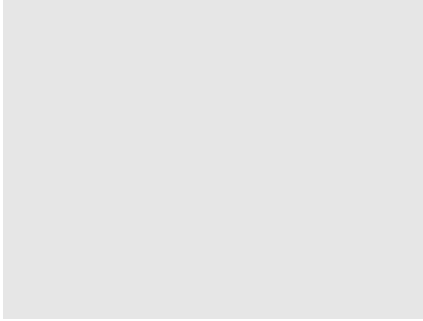
They worry, too, about the impact of the outbursts of violence and civil unrest in cities and towns across the country. They are very much aware of the need for Biden to thread the needle, mollifying the vocals on his left while turning aside Trump's accusations that he is anti-police and pro-anarchy.

He's embraced the strategy of conducting a near-stealth candidacy while watching from afar hoping Trump self-immolates.

While polling in June and July is a notoriously poor indicator of results in November – ask Hillary Clinton – Biden has compiled leads ranging from a margin of error four points to a total blowout of 15 points even though the level of enthusiasm remains a concern.

Underestimating Trump, however, is dangerous – again ask Hillary – but time is running out on the president.

Come November, Kissinger’s hope from 1980 won’t be fulfilled, and the American people will live with the result.



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