

American decline is a myth

By Conrad Black

The Middle East is changing unpredictably from one week to the next. It is clear that U.S. President Donald Trump is determined to achieve his objectives of ending Iran's nuclear military aspirations and its sponsorship of terrorist activity especially on the borders of Israel but also across the world, and he is determined that Iran not interrupt the flow of oil from the Middle East, even though the United States is not much affected by it. It is also clear that he will go to considerable lengths to achieve his objectives without inflicting terrible violence on the unoffending and long-suffering civil population of Iran.

It is not the least of Trump's achievements that he has developed a technique for accomplishing foreign policy goals with minimal casualties to the United States and civilians of affected countries: this was the case in removing the president of Venezuela and blowing up Iran's nuclear laboratories last summer. Trump knows that he will lose all credibility if he fails in Iran and he knows that his strong claim to be an important and successful president of his country depends on his accomplishing a reasonable success in the current Middle East crisis. It is also more obvious than ever that the correlation of military forces between United States and Israel on one side, and Iran on the other is overwhelmingly in Trump's favour. Iran has no significant air defences or navy left, a sharply reduced supply of missiles and launchers for retaliation, and the United States possesses the ability to close Iran's ports, stop its exports, and strangle it at minimal risk to itself. (The ability of the United States Navy to close or regulate passage through the Hormuz Strait is much greater than Iran's.)



It is clearly difficult for observers to evaluate Trump's statement that the people with whom his administration is dealing in Iran are in fact more flexible and reasonable than the horrifying theocracy that has been riveted upon the back of that country these 47 years. If he is dealing now with a faction capable of committing and delivering Iran to an acceptable settlement, this is an immense accomplishment and he was absolutely right to accept a ceasefire to work out an agreement. The history of negotiation with this regime in Iran is so negative that optimism is in short supply. On the other hand, even his detractors acknowledge that Trump is an experienced negotiator. He is in a position of incontestable strength and he has made it clear that he believes (and is correct in believing) that the peace, and peace of mind, of the world cannot be preserved if the absolute and partly suicidally distracted leadership of Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear weapons and its sponsorship of terrorism. For all of these reasons, I think Trump can be given the benefit of the doubt that he will either get a solution without massive further destruction visited upon Iran, or he will inflict that destruction and impose that solution.

As was mentioned in previous columns here, international developments are tumbling along in such a syncopated way that

it is difficult to see the underlying trend. Trump has effectively eliminated Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, and Iran as functioning Russo-Chinese allies, has prepared conditions to make Ukraine an unaffordable war for Russia, has put great strain on China's oil supply, and has ended the post-Cold War NATO hibernation of the free-riding "alliance of the willing." He has effectively ended American oil imports, substantially reduced the trade deficit, nearly stopped the free flow of migrants with no particular attachment to the United States flooding into it (including large numbers of violent criminals), and drastically reduced violent crime rates and the flow of lethal narcotic into the country. He has also cranked up economic growth, deregulated, lowered taxes, ended the nonsensical green obsession, and broken the stranglehold of the teachers' unions which had transformed American schools into disorderly daycare centres and most of higher education into an unemployment deferment program in which lazy tenured and often subversive faculty qualified America's youth to do things that could not possibly earn them a living in adult life. (How many professors of gender studies does America need?) He has also sharpened up American armed forces and the extraordinary precision and efficiency with which they've carried out their missions in his second term, including the substantial deconstruction of Iran without widespread civilian or significant American casualties and the clockwork deployment of very large number of people and aircraft to rescue a downed pilot in Iran, are a stark contrast with the Russian and Chinese equipment that Iran has used to try to defend itself. It is also an amazing contrast with the four years of floundering and heavy casualties of Russia in its failed aggression in Ukraine.

All of these steps have strengthened America. And the world is shifting finally to allow for the final disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of Russia as a superpower. The major countries of Western Europe are collectively and even individually much stronger than Russia and they don't really

need American protection if they are prepared to pay for their own defence and guarantee the new post-Soviet states. Russia is not a rival to the United States and there is no reason for there to be serious abrasions between them or for Russia, which remains a proud and important nationality, to be reduced to near-vassalage by China. Insofar as the United States has a rival, it is China, and that's where America is turning. Europe, including Russia, is in decline and will have to determine if it possesses the genius of renewal. But the United States economy is 150 per cent of China's and its military and scientific superiority are evident. By every available measurement, the United States is rallying from its recent torpor of vapid woke self-flagellation and is accelerating forward much more quickly than the ramshackle totalitarian People's Republic.

The widespread drivel about American decline has been drowned out in the fall-back lamentation of Trump hate. Trump is a vulgarian and a number of his mannerisms as a public personality are jarring. He bullied Iran into dropping its conditions for promising not to harass traffic in the Strait of Hormuz by essentially the same hyper-aggressive and crudely stated formula by which he launched his business career by winning the contract to renovate the Commodore Hotel in New York 50 years ago. These were constant outrageous statements and demands while waving about a thick wad of papers which he represented as a "signed agreement;" which it was, but signed only by him until he finally exhausted his interlocutors and they gave him his deal. These are his methods. They are frequently undignified and unnerving, but they work.

Canada should not be padding around trying to raise "middle powers" in resentment of the U.S. We have no good reason to resent the Americans. We should make ourselves competitive again and resume our progress to ever greater success.

First published in the [National Post](#)