

Collapse of Syria final death knell of 1919 attempts by Allies to build nations

By Conrad Black

Whatever else it may be, the collapse of the Assad government in Syria must rank as the final unflattering death knell of



One bad idea after another: Clemenceau, Wilson, Lloyd George, no idea how to preserve peace, no idea how a nation is built (Photo by Hulton-Deutsch/Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images)

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n-building by the victorious Allied leaders at the end of World War I in 1919. They created five countries: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, though Syria and Lebanon, like the contemporary Israel and Jordan, passed under a League of Nations mandate in favour of France and the United Kingdom until after World War II.

Today Czechoslovakia is divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and there was never the slightest reason to imagine that they would happily coexist in the same country, though the Czech Republic has been a successful state in the 34 years

since it was emancipated from the overlordship of the Soviet Union, and Slovakia has made tolerable progress in that time. Yugoslavia is now nine separate countries of widely varying levels of success, and during World War II, Yugoslavia suffered 1.6 million combat deaths, 600,000 of fighting the German and Italian invaders and the other million in internecine warfare; the whole notion of such a country was an insane concept.

Syria has now disintegrated completely, having been governed for 53 years by a totalitarian Alawite despotism that ethnically represented only eleven per cent of the population. Iraq fragmented under the American and allied occupation and the Iraq War that was designed to transform that country into a democracy instead has turned it into essentially a satellite of Iran, a development as far removed as what was hoped for as it was possible to achieve. Like the wonderful city of Beirut, Lebanon always flourishes if given a chance but Lebanon itself, profoundly divided between Muslims and Maronite Christians, has never had sufficient strength to defend itself from its Arab neighbours: first Syria and more recently, the Hezbollah terrorist organization that was also the last prop of the Assad regime. The Syrian population and the entire Middle East, except for the pseudo-theocratic thuggee in Teheran, owes a heavy debt of gratitude to the Israeli Defence Forces for almost exterminating the Hamas terrorist organization, decimating the Hezbollah terrorist organization, and effectively bringing down the Assad tyranny.

The failure of all these states created by the principal Allied leaders in 1919: US President Woodrow Wilson, French Premier Georges Clemenceau, and British Prime Minister David Lloyd George only illustrates that even outstanding war leaders often have no idea of how to preserve the peace, and nation-building must start with some sort of collective common interest, usually based on shared ethnicity, though Switzerland in particular is an exception to that general

rule. We should also remember the contribution made to the recent sanguinary chaos in the Middle East by US President Carter's hostility to the Shah of Iran and President George W. Bush's demand for elections in Gaza and Lebanon without a thought to the possibility that the democratic choice of voters in such places could easily be undemocratic movements: Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

A much more promising expression of policy came from the President-elect of the United States in Paris this weekend for the splendid reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral. He declared that Syria was not America's conflict and that if the Russians indeed had been expelled from the country, that was a good thing because "They had no business being there in the first place." The leader of the apparently principal anti-Assad faction has been loudly proclaiming for years that he is no longer an ISIL and Al Qaeda ally or a terrorist at all, and it is not beyond the realm of hope that he will be a semi-civilised leader of government. What is needed is some sort of federation of the shattered elements of Syria, and if any external tutelage is to be exerted, it is probably best left to the Turks to do it. The pratfall of the Russians in Syria is another illustration, on top of their thoroughly underwhelming performance against Ukraine, as the Kremlin seeks an instant restoration of the influence of the Soviet Union, that Russia is vastly exceeding its real status in the correlation of forces.

Even better news is the decisive humiliation of the ghastly despotism in Iran. Its entire strength was based on its bankrolling and supplying Hamas and Hezbollah and the Houthi terrorists in Yemen, as well as its feverish work on a nuclear military capacity. Its terrorist puppets have been reduced to a point of extreme vulnerability, and its aerial defences have been practically eliminated by the Israeli Air Force. President Trump stated in his famous debate with President Biden that ended the latter's career that he would not

tolerate Iran's becoming a nuclear military power, and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said the same thing when he addressed the United States Congress in late summer. It is a reasonable inference that the United States will advise Iran on approximately Inauguration Day, January 20, that Iran either abandons its nuclear military program or faces a brusque military interdiction that will accomplish that goal.

The strategic defeat of Iran and Russia greatly enhances the prospects for peace in the Middle East and Ukraine. The Jewish state has given the world a splendid Christmas present and we should all be grateful for it.

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