

The West is Hardly in Decline



by Conrad Black

It is easy to become somewhat despondent with the apparent condition of the West and of the world generally, but that conclusion is deceptive and unjustified. The war in Ukraine remains a largely unsuccessful act of naked aggression by Russia that has exposed the military of that country as inept and inefficient. Russia has a legitimate historic interest in Ukraine, but as almost the whole world recognized, it had no right to try to subjugate that country, especially having, along with the United States and the United Kingdom, guaranteed the frontiers of Ukraine when it gave up the nuclear weapons it inherited from the USSR. What is needed now is someone of the stature and competence representing an adequately influential jurisdiction, to bring the war to an end on the basis of giving a little to the Russians and securing absolute and ironclad guarantees from Russia and NATO of the revised borders of a sovereign Ukraine.

In practice, Germany is too fretful for such a role, France is insufficiently influential, and Britain is too flustered and distracted. The current U.S. president and administration doesn't possess anyone of the required stature. CIA director William Burns might have the talents needed, but is preoccupied with the war in Gaza. But some such settlement as described will be achieved, and with it the western world, whose eastern border 35 years ago was the division between East and West Germany, will have moved 800 miles to the east almost to the Don River. And once that war is resolved, the West and Russia can revitalize their relations and we can subtly encourage the internal Russian party of western emulation over the balky and xenophobic nationalists who have hijacked its policy and thrust Russia into the grasping arms

of China. There is still every reason to believe that the result of that war will be, on balance, a victory for the West and a setback for the anti-Western and sociopathic elements of Russian policymaking.

The war in Gaza is less complicated though the circumstances that produced it are more intractable than the partial vacuum created by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The Jews have been in what is now Israel for more than 5,000 years and the most spectacular decline in their population in that time came with the conversion of the majority of Jews to Christianity in the first few centuries of the Christian era, but they continued to be ethnic Jews. The Phoenicians, Jews, Egyptians, Syrians, Persians, Macedonians, Seleucids, Romans, Byzantines, Arabians, Turks, and British have governed there, but not the Palestinians.

The origin of Palestinian claims is the promise of the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, in 1917 when the area was still governed by the Ottoman Turks, that the Jews would have a homeland in Palestine, without compromising the rights of the Palestinian Arabs: the British gave Turkish real estate away to two different parties at the same time, fundamentally a fraudulent transaction. In the dire circumstances of the First World War, it was an attempt to assuage Jewish opinion in the United States while inciting Arab revolt in Palestine. The motives were unexceptionable and the circumstances were desperate, but we have been trying to sort out the consequences ever since.

Israel was established after its neighbours rejected a United Nations plan to partition the land between Jews and Arabs. As it was founded, it joined the UN in 1949. The legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state is completely unsusceptible to question, and the attempt to represent it as entirely a wrongful occupation of anyone else's territory is not even slightly sustainable. The Jews have transformed a primitive country in one lifetime into a sophisticated and prosperous

democratic state where the deserts now bloom, and a nuclear power. The elimination by force of Israel is impossible and all attempts to do so are doomed in advance, as well as illegal.

The Palestinians deserve sympathy and, in some measure, support. Their cause was amplified by Egyptian President Abdel Nasser and his followers in the Arab world, largely as a distraction of the Arab masses from the misgovernment that was inflicted on most of them by their governments. It was the Arab powers that kept the Palestinians in refugee camps that were teeming infestations of aspiring terrorists. The Palestinian leadership has been thoroughly corrupt. Yasser Arafat and others enjoyed their great international prominence and willfully perpetuated the war with Israel. They could have had an independent Palestine any time in the last 25 years, but this would have removed them as important international figures and confined them to the leadership of a few million Palestinians in another dusty little Middle Eastern country.

The solution to this problem is not as complicated as it appears. Hamas is widely recognized, including by the Arab powers, as a terrorist organization and the sooner Israel destroys its terrorist capabilities the better, and the Arab powers will be as pleased as the Jewish state with that outcome. The ratio of military to civilian casualties among the population of Gaza indicates that Israel is conducting the war with commendable solicitude for civilians, contrary to the customary propaganda eagerly parroted by some anti-Israel voices in the West, the useless idiots of our media and academic communities and the rest of the rag bag of assorted antisemites. Hamas committed an act of war against Israel, Israel declared war, which has been conducted by a national unity government determined to uphold the post-Holocaust promise that the Jews would "never again" go passively to their deaths in large numbers.

Now that their ancient foes, the Persians, and to some extent

the Turks, are encroaching upon the Arabs, Israel is a natural ally of the Arab states and the progress towards a reconciliation between them will be resumed when the Hamas terrorist apparatus has been disposed of by the Israeli Defense Forces in another couple of months. A two-state solution might then be possible, and the world will be a better place.

There is a lot of flippant talk about the United States being in decline. All countries do well under inspired leaders. Countries demonstrate their durability by surviving inadequate government. All polls show that the American public believe that their current administration has failed in all major policy areas: immigration, inflation, urban crime, energy and excessive environmental zeal, international relations and war prevention. The ferocity with which the palsied bipartisan American establishment has perverted its justice system to try spuriously to incriminate the leader of the opposition shows that while it is incompetent, dishonest, and desperate, the American political establishment is not decadent. The fact that the majority of Americans disapprove of the repurposing of the justice system for partisan purposes is also a demonstration of national fibre.

There have been flippant comparisons between the United States and the late western Roman Empire. But for most of its last century, the western Roman Empire was very unsteadily governed by generals who were elevated in military coups, did not reside in Rome, were not in fact Romans, and sat helpless as millions of barbarians swarmed across the northern and eastern borders of the Empire, pressed by the more belligerent Huns and other fugitives from the sulfurous bowels of the Eurasian landmass. Except for Diocletian, Constantine, and a few others, the last 30 Roman emperors died violently. The United States remains a vibrant and more or less constitutional democracy. It is infinitely stronger than China, a debt-ridden, totalitarian, resource-poor country, still with a

semi-command economy; much less the discarded Russian husk of the Soviet Union and the Romanov Empire. Both countries have shrinking populations.

There is much room for hope and no reason for despair.

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