

The world is a better place without Qassem Soleimani

The corrupt and oppressive regime of the ayatollahs cannot be far from the position Nicolai Ceausescu reached in Romania in 1989

by Conrad Black



A week ago, on Jan. 3, Tony Burman, a contributor to the *Toronto Star* and former long-time employee of the CBC and then of Al Jazeera, wrote in the *Star*: “The assassination of Iran’s second most powerful leader at the direction of U.S. President Donald Trump will likely have the same seismic impact on the modern history of the Middle East that the disastrous U.S. invasion of Iraq had in 2003. It will be interpreted in Iran and beyond as an act of war. It will ensure severe Iranian retaliation against American military forces as well as vulnerable U.S. allies in the Middle East. And it will lead to a cascade of unpredictable events that will once again plunge the region, and the United States, into another cycle of

death. This is a very dangerous moment.

“The world now knows what can happen when an American president is motivated, not by a wise understanding of U.S. strategic interests, but by adolescent impulse and whim, as he darts in and out of the buffet line at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida. The shock for many in the murder early Friday morning of Iran’s General Qassem Soleimani in an American drone strike near the Baghdad airport was that there was no clear answer to the question of ‘Why Now?’ ”

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I first knew Tony Burman more than 45 years ago when we both lived in Montreal; although we had our ideological differences, our relations were cordial; we have a number of mutual friends and I don’t doubt our relations would be cordial if we encountered each other again. In the passage quoted above, he laid out a rich panoply of widely shared leftist misconceptions that helps explain the complete failure of modern leftist government in the West. All serious governments in the world except for Iran and a couple of others are united in their antagonism to terrorism. The United States has been conducting what consecutive administrations have called a “war on terrorism” since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Under the generally recognized rules of counterterrorism, including by the governments of China and Russia, it is permissible to kill terrorists without due process. This applied to Soleimani, as it did when American forces killed Osama bin Laden (2011) and drove Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to suicide (2019). No governments uttered lamentations over them, and no legitimate government except Iran did over Soleimani, and the references to his death as an assassination and to the deceased himself as a virtual Iranian General Douglas MacArthur, are nonsense. He

was, like the other two, a wretched, psychopathic mass-killer, though not without talent in his wickedness.



People attend a funeral procession for Iranian Major-General Qassem Soleimani, head of the Quds Force, and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who were killed in an airstrike at Baghdad airport, in Tehran, on Jan. 6, 2020. File Photo

It is precisely Trump's appreciation and reinforcement of the American strategic position that has already demonstrated the complete falsity of Burman's predictions of "severe Iranian retaliation" and a "seismic impact ... like the disastrous U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003." The Iranian retaliation was a fireworks display of 16 missiles carefully fired into Iraq from Iran to avoid disturbing a single American. The ayatollahs were so flustered they mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian civil airliner killing 176 people, including 57 Canadians. There was no prominent American more vehemently opposed to the 2003 invasion of Iraq than Donald Trump, and he was equally opposed to the insane Obama-conceived treaty with Iran in 2015 that allowed it to continue to develop long-range missiles and nuclear warheads but to suspend creation of fissile material, subject to porous verification, for 10 years, i.e. five years from now, with a \$100-billion signing bonus of eased sanctions and released funds (which no doubt helped Iran acquire the missiles used in its little squeak of retaliation this week).

The basic tenets of American foreign policy were enunciated by Franklin D. Roosevelt in two addresses to the Congress in 1941. In his State of the Union message in January of that year he said: "We must always be wary of those who 'with sounding brass and tinkling cymbal' would preach the 'ism' of appeasement," and in his war message following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December he said: "We will make very certain that this form of treachery never again endangers us." Since then, the United States has not appeased dangerous and

evil regimes, and it has deterred direct attack. Its enemies have sought refuge in the technique of surreptitiously supporting non-sovereign terrorist activity, especially where the perpetrators are indifferent about dying in their terrorist actions, which complicates the process of attaching responsibility to national governments. This was the error in George W. Bush's war in Iraq – Iraq wasn't the real terrorist enemy, and Bush compounded his error by trying to turn the artificial state of Iraq, fabricated by the victorious powers after the First World War, into a perfect democracy like the state of Connecticut.

And the only serious lapse in post-Roosevelt American avoidance of appeasement was Obama's asinine nuclear agreement with Iran. The first act in the trifecta of American disasters in the Middle East was President Carter's abandonment of the Shah of Iran, that helped bring this ghastly, terrorism-sponsoring theocratic despotism in Iran down on the world, in 1979. Trump has restored the Roosevelt formula; he has rebuilt the American military capability, and possesses, as the U.S. joint chiefs of staff made clear last week, the ability to eliminate every militarily relevant target in Iran in 30 minutes, without risking the life of a single American in doing so. This is where Burman's analysis, and that of the international left generally, including the Gong Show of unfeasible Democratic presidential candidates, breaks down completely. Trump didn't react when the Iranians blew up the principal Saudi oil refining capacity last year; he will not fight Saudi Arabia's battles for it.

But he made it clear that he would not tolerate attacks on Americans and after the Iranian assault on the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, which trashed the reception centre and required the Marines to tear-gas the mob, the Iranian ruler Ayatollah Khamenei gloated on Jan. 2 that there was "Not a damn thing (Trump) can do about it." There was and he did, and Trump warned that if there were any retaliation that injured

Americans the response would be "immediate and disproportionate." Burman and his friends on the left should realize the irresistible power of America to punish its enemies, as long as it is not suckered into quagmires of heavy and lengthy personnel-commitment. After Vietnam and Afghanistan and Iraq, where the United States and its external allies were militarily undefeated but it was morally impractical to use the level of force on civilian populations that would have been required to exterminate the enemy, it now knows to fight its enemies by appropriate recourse to economic strangulation, precise and overwhelming applications of high-technology military force, and subtle manipulation of local balances of strength.

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Trump is right to permit the Turks and Russians to pay the bills in Syria, as long as they prevent humanitarian disasters and value American goodwill above intimacy with Iran. The corrupt and oppressive regime of the ayatollahs cannot take the present American sanctions indefinitely and are not far from failing the test of trying to fire live ammunition at masses of their own civil population. They cannot be far from the position Nicolae Ceausescu reached in Romania in 1989, when such orders led to his own overthrow and execution. The incursions of the Turks and Persians, the ancient foes of the Arabs, has created the alliance between Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The Palestinians have overplayed their hand and have been put over the side by the Arab powers; they will have to take whatever Israel offers. Since the British sold the same real estate to both sides in 1917, there will have to be a division, presumably along the lines of the Taba discussions of 2000-2001. Trump will be able to deal more easily with Russia now that his domestic enemies can't shriek "Treason!" every time he has a civilized exchange with Vladimir Putin.

It is unfolding well (despite the tragedy of the Ukrainian airliner). The world is a better place without Soleimani. Tony Burman will see it eventually.

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