

# America's resurgence is reshaping the world

The U.S. is demonstrating almost effortlessly how illusory is the idea that any other country or group of countries can challenge its pre-eminence.

by Conrad Black



President Donald Trump speaks to members of the military at a rally at Al Asad Air Base in Iraq on Dec. 26, 2018. (Andrew Harnik/AP)

Almost indiscernible in the endless tumult about President Donald Trump is the objective return of American might, right on our doorstep. A casual sampler of the Canadian, and even the American, media, might think that the United States was so far along in its decline that the entire process of government

and normal public discourse had broken down in that country, and that the much-discussed process of national decline was accelerating in a climate of virtual chaos.

In fact, the economy of the United States is astoundingly strong: full employment, an expanding work force, negligible inflation and about three per cent economic growth. And it is a broad economic recovery, not based on service industries as in the United Kingdom (where London handles most of Europe's financial industry, while most of British industry has fled), and not based largely on the fluctuating resources markets as has often been Canada's experience. In the eight years of president Obama, the United States lost 219,000 manufacturing jobs; in the two years of Trump, the country has added 477,000 manufacturing jobs. This was not supposed to be possible, and this time, unlike in the great Reagan boom, it cannot be dismissed by the left (and it was false in the eighties) as a profusion of "hamburger flippers, dry cleaners and people delivering pizza," (all necessary occupations).



U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping, along with members of their delegations, hold a dinner meeting at the end of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Buenos Aires, on Dec. 1, 2018. Saul Loeb/AFP

It is clear that China is feeling the heat of American tariffs. Their magnificent hypocrisy of gamboling in a \$360-billion trade surplus with the United States while extorting technology from American companies and reducing American high-tech giants like Apple and Google to snivelling on China's behalf when their sales in that country are reduced, and all the while leading G-77 in cupped-hands requests for relief from the economically most advanced countries for their pollution of the world environment (although China is the world's greatest polluter), all of it is ending. The United States will not be the world's premier chump anymore. The most enthusiastic support the United States is receiving in its trade stance with China is from China's neighbours, from India

to Japan. Of course China is the world's second-greatest power and must be treated with respect, but that does not mean the shameless grovelling of Trump's predecessors, paying court to Beijing like lackeys kowtowing to the emperors of the Middle Kingdom.

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Every U.S. president starting with Dwight Eisenhower has bewailed American dependence on foreign oil. Foreigners then supplied 10 per cent of America's oil, a figure that rose to 60 per cent under president Obama, and no one has done anything about it, until the past two years, when oil production has been sharply increased and reliance on oil imports has been sharply cut, on its inexorable way to zero. For decades, whenever the U.S. made purposeful noises about doing the necessary to reduce oil imports, the Saudis engineered a cut in the international price and American will collapsed backwards into the contemptible torpor of declining powers. All that has changed. What were for centuries the Great Powers, and for nearly 50 years after the Second World War, the principal Western Allies and the Soviet Union, have been reconfigured. The Soviet Union has been sliced down to Russia with about 40 per cent of the former Soviet population, offering a pallid replication of Gaullist efforts to make France great again by being an annoying gadfly irritating the Americans around the world. Charles de Gaulle was a great statesman, who personified the historic cultural and political attainments of France in its most difficult and dishonoured times; Vladimir Putin is just another chief thug residing in the Kremlin.



A Soviet tank moulders near Kandahar air field in Afghanistan in an undated photo. Postmedia Archive

China has replaced the U.S.S.R. as principal rival to the U.S., but now has no ideological distinction, as well as, in

replication of the Soviets, no institutions that function except the army. It is trying to beat the United States at its own game of capitalism, but the Chinese version is a hodge-podge of state capitalism and a command economy, and the recoil of the Chinese from the pressure that has been applied by this U.S. administration demonstrates more clearly what the real balance of power is between the two economies. China is the greatest economic development story in the history of the world, but as a challenge to the paramount status the United States has occupied for over a century among the world's nations, it won't fly. Washington has seen it all, and seen it off, before.

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And there is Europe. Canadians were rightly offended, as Australians and New Zealanders were, when British prime minister Edward Heath tried to plunge headlong into Europe in 1972, having failed to make it as the Common Market negotiator for Harold MacMillan in 1963. We were put over the side for Britain to take a total immersion bath in Europe. Nine years later, Margaret Thatcher did a 240-degree turn, brushed Europe back and plunged into a splendid renewal of the Special Relationship with the United States. She and Ronald Reagan did a credible job of filling the shoes of Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, and they did as efficient a job of leading the West to victory in the Cold War as their revered antecedents did in leading the West to victory in the Second World War. But before long, the special relationship gave way under British leaders more attracted by Europe and American leaders who had little interest in Britain. Then came a half-hearted British effort to go back head-first into Europe. It faltered and the Albion is faltering and befuddled.



A man takes a photograph of a mural by street artist Banksy, depicting a star being chiselled from the European flag, in Dover, southeast England, on Jan. 7, 2019. Matt Dunham/AP

The problem with the European Union is both practical and theoretical. As a practical matter, it is governed by a bureaucracy of Dutch and Belgian scribes and functionaries that is answerable neither to the ludicrous European Parliament in Strasbourg, the ultimate irrelevant talking shop, nor to the principal member states, and is exacting its revenge for centuries of deference to France, Germany and Britain.

The Germans don't mind the shower of authoritarian directives from Brussels – they are accustomed to regimentation and are the leading power in Europe anyway. The French and Italians don't mind, because they never pay any attention to what governments say and generally regard government as a bunch of crooks and incompetents and hypocrites anyway (often correctly). The British, however, do like to be law-abiding, and generally do pay some attention to the legislation and edicts of those who rule, and rightly judge Brussels to be insufferable and stifling. The underlying theory of Europe was that a century after the hecatomb of the First World War that engulfed Europe, and many decades after the Europeans gave us the blessings of totalitarian Communism and Naziism, the European powers, from Poland to Iberia and the North Cape to Cyprus, would stand on each other's heads and regain their status as the centre of the world. The whole idea was unutterable nonsense, and the structure is now crumbling.

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France has elected a complete outsider as president and the brave new regime has been humbled and defiled by the imperishable Paris mobs, the extras and stagehands at 10 abrupt and profound changes of governmental structure in 230 years, and of countless sporting efforts to get the regimes' attention with riots and vandalism. The splendid boulevards of Paris have seen it all before many times. Mighty Germany, its

governing coalition almost worn threadbare by the imprudent admission of a million desperate Middle Eastern and African refugees, has delivered itself over to energy dependence on the feeble gangster-state of Russia while cutting its NATO contribution to half of what it had promised and complaining of American lack of enthusiasm to continue carrying Germany on its crowded and under-appreciated shoulders. Italy is in more profound political shambles than ever; Spain is distracted by a separatist threat that the central government has bungled (it could have learned from Canada but didn't).



A yellow vest protester dons a red bonnet, which symbolizes the French Revolution, during a march in Paris on Jan. 5, 2019. Kamil Zihnioglu/AP

Through it all, the United States, appearing to be disorderly, its establishment and media at war with the occupant of the White House, is demonstrating almost effortlessly how illusory is the idea that any other country or group of countries can challenge its pre-eminence among the world's nations. Canadians may not like it; the world may try to pretend otherwise, but however the domestic political tides of America may flow, North Korea is on its best behaviour, the ayatollahs are quaking in their voluminous raiment, and all America's trade partners, including Canada and China, are accepting what amounts to unilateral renegotiation by the U.S. No other country in the world has any appreciable influence at all more than a few hundred miles from its borders (an area that includes 95 per cent of the population of Canada).

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