AS AMERICA'S SKY GETS DARK

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"All empires fall, eventually. But why? It's not for lack of power. In fact, it seems to be the opposite. Their power lulls them into comfort. They become undisciplined. Those who had to earn power are replaced by those who have known nothing else, who have no comprehension of the need to rise above base desires*"

Max Barry, Australian Author in Lexicon

Let us start with a quiz.

Question 1. What do these Empires have in common?

(a) Roman
(b) Macedonian
(c) Mongol
(d) Spain
(e) France
(f) Britain

Answer: They all were ex-world champions, yesterday Kings.

Question 2. What factor(s) led to the ultimate dissolution of the above Empires?

(a) Moral decadence, unbridled corruption and greed
(b) Zero-sum politics, irreconcilable differences, desperation, and naivety among the elites
(c) Military misadventure and over commitment
(d) Economic meltdown and wholesale natural disasters
(e) Advent of superior technology in the hands of the underdogs
(f) Profligacy and unsustainable debt portfolio
(g) Weak leadership and destructive succession tussle
(h) All of the above

Answer: "h"- All of the above.

Question 3. Which country poses the biggest existential threat to the US today in its role as the world's sole Super Power?

(a) China

(b) Russia

(c) North Korea

(d) Iran

(e) Europe Union

(f) America

Answer: "f": America. The biggest threat facing the US today is neither from China nor Russia, but from America itself. The insect eating up the vegetable leaves, as the African proverb says, is within the vegetable leaves.

No civilisation is immutable. Power is in perpetual motion, has no permanent address, and no permanent telephone number. To access Power in the 15th Century, you first had to dial +351 with Lisbon serving as its world's headquarters; in the 16th Century, it was +34 with Toledo as the world's centre of civilisation; the 17th Century belonged to +31 of the Dutch with Amsterdam as the world's centre of gravity; in the 18th Century, it was Paris and its +33, with the cliché "see Paris and die' eloquently bearing testimony to how beautiful and powerful Paris was back then. The 19th Century was London's turn to rise, shine and rule. Britain itself entered its decade of decline in 1935, and by 1945 the Empire was no more. Power changed its address from London to Washington, and also its access telephone code from +44 to +1.

Presently, it increasingly seems as if the +1 signal is experiencing poor network connectivity and quality. Consequently, Mr Power now uses a DUAL SIM PHONE for the first time in 85 years: SIM 1 is +1 while SIM 2 is +86! Paradoxically, as SIM1 signal gets weak, SIM2 (+86) seems to be enjoying better network quality delivery. Clearly, Power never rests, and never lasts. It is ever fragile, forever slippery and truly transient.

Civilisation, like tomatoes, potatoes, and plantains, is a perishable commodity and with an expiry shelf life. Some civilisations stay long on the shelf, like the Roman Empire (over 1000 years). Others, like Qin Dynasty in China (15 year reign) came to the stage powerfully with great promises but disappeared in a jiffy. The sky turns dark, slowly. Banana turns brown, slowly. Empires rise and fall, slowly. There is no equilibrium in crisis – once it starts, a cascading crisis becomes inevitable, unpredictable.

The Mongol Empire, generally regarded as the largest contiguous and strongest empire the world has ever known, disappeared from the face of the Earth. The Empire covered 9.15 million square miles of land – greater than 16% of the Earth's landmass; with 110 million population between 1270 –1309, representing roughly 25% of the then universe's population. A combination of political upheavals and natural disasters led to the death of about 45 million people in Europe and Mongolia, and the Mongol Empire eventually became history. This is a wakeup call to America that, irrespective of size and might, every empire is born to die.

In 1939, on the eve of World War 2, it will be recalled that the US military capability was smaller

compared with Portugal. But as Europe and Japan went up in flames and their land covered with ashes, the US with just 6% of the world's population but with 50% of the global economy and 93% of all the global automobiles, as well as superior technological inventions, successfully tilted the balance of power in favour of the Allied Powers. America therefore faced zero opposition when it decided to collect the leadership baton from Britain as the new World's Class Captain in 1945.

As the World is in the grip of an unprecedented pandemic, history is about to repeat itself with China now the one helping the US to bring stability back into the world through its massive injection of funds into the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations (UN). But it is highly unlikely that China is doing all this for altruistic reasons. It is trite to argue that the country that is trying to extinguish the fire was the same country that set the world on fire in the first instance! The question is: which country has the hose, water, skill and will to extinguish the global fire today? China, +86, undoubtedly.

Both the defunct USSR (Project Y) and USA (Project X) were experiments. USSR's dissolution on Boxing Day, 26th December, 1991 when the Soviet hammer and sickle flag was lowered for the last time after barely 70 years of existence (1922-1991), did not come to many as a surprise. This was so because the upheavals and unrest among its 15 constituents republics that started in the 1980s had weakened the Union to its foundations and collapse was a natural progression in 1991, following a decade of crisis.

On the other hand, America (Project X) is an on-going experiment tagged THE AMERICAN DREAM: the ideal that regardless of race, religion or social ranking, all Americans are one with equality of opportunity, allowing the highest and finest aspirations and goals to be realised without systemic roadblock. But after 243 years, it seems as if the hope and aspirations and expectations of 1776 have metamorphosed into frustrations and disillusionment and gloominess of 2020. The American dream is fast becoming a nightmare.

Judging by the level of desperation in American politics today, the possibility of a post-election crisis of the type that is common in the Developing World is highly likely. Both Presidential candidates have cast doubts on the outcome of an election that has not yet been held. Secretary Hillary Clinton has advised Candidate Joe Biden: "Do not concede under any circumstance because I believe the other side is going to cheat and sneak and try everything they possibly can." (Hillary sounded here like a typical Kenyan or Nigerian opposition leader!). And President Bill Clinton capped it: "Trump will reinforce the Whitehouse to keep officials from pulling him out on the inauguration day". And listen to Joe Biden's conclusion: "If President Trump refuses to concede defeat, the US Military must be prepared to pull him out from the White House by any means possible". President Trump himself has refused to pledge a peaceful transfer of power when asked. That looks like another Cote D'Ivoire Movie Part 2 following the Part 1 that pitched President Laurent Gbagbo against Alassane Quattara in 2011. This is a new low in the history of American democracy.

The House has not fallen though, but its wall has certainly cracked and the Americans' kitchen doors are opening. The Contender, who has been patiently waiting for this moment, does not need force to enter the house to snatch the prize. The COVID-19 Pandemic completely shredded the illusion of American supremacy and exceptionalism. For the first time in 100 years, members of the International community from Russia to China had to rush relief materials and medical aid to help the now humbled America that was practically brought to its knees by "China virus".

While the COVID-19 fire ravages America (and the world), several other fires are burning America to the near point of a conflagration. One of them is the proliferation of firearms. There are now more dangerous firearms in the hands of private citizens today in the US than at any other time in its history. That is, more guns in America today than the population. For the first 180 days in 2020, 19 million firearms were sold, representing more than one firearm for every 20 Americans, according to the research carried out by Professor of Economics, Phillip Levine of Wellesley College.

As of June 2020, there were over 400 million guns in America for a population of 330 million people, according to an FBI report. The average daily sales of firearms jumped from 80,000 per day in January to 100,000 per day in February, 176,000 per day in March. By June 2020, a total of 3.9 million firearms had been sold in the US. Predictably, there are more spikes in firearms sales in states with higher levels of racial animus. Another interesting dimension to the firearms sales is the level of disproportional firearms ownership between the whites (49%) and the Blacks (32%).

Besides, America is militarily over stretched. In the last 10 years it has spent over $6 trillion in military expeditions. According to President Jimmy Carter, in its 243 years of nationhood, America has enjoyed just 16 years of war-free (peace) years: "America is the most warlike nation in the history of the world". On the other hand, the Contender to the throne, China, has not gone to war since 1970.

The Economic front is no less troubling for America. On the morning of August 10th, 2020 when the list of Global Fortune 500 (GF500) companies was released, it was clear that it is now more Chinese than American. In 1990, when Global Fortune 500 published its first edition, there were no Chinese companies on the list. Within 30 years, China has caught up with America in trade volume and even surpassed US in global exports (13.45% vs 8.98% in 2018). 30 years ago, China's total export was $280.9 billion or 3% of the global trade (according to UN Comtrade).

In 2019 China had 129 companies as against the US's 126 in GF500. In 2020, China has 133 as against US's 121. While five US companies dropped from the list in the past year, China gained four new entrants into the big club within the same period.

As at today, about 40 million Americans face eviction as a result of their inability to pay house rent (CNN Research). Furthermore, 59 million have filed for unemployment within the last 24 weeks and 3.3 million businesses have been shut down. Worse hit are blacks, as 41% of African-American businesses are bankrupt. According to the Insurance Information Institute, insured losses from the multiple civil unrest rocking the US in 2020 has reached about $1.4 billion, with over 1,500 businesses heavily damaged, while many were completely destroyed as at June 30th 2020.

The third biggest fire is that 2021 will be the first time that America's debt ($26.73 trillion as of August 2020) will surpass the size of its economy. America will be the only developed country in that unenviable position. The list of America's sad statistics continues, as 23% of children are raised by single parents. These children are more vulnerable to drugs, crime and purposeless-life. Meanwhile, 52% or 26.6 million young adults (Ages 18-29), according to the latest Pew Research Centre, now live with their parents for economic success. The closest Americans have ever been to this was during the time of the Great Depression in 1940 when the figure of young adults living with their parents was 48%.

Here is another big fire: since 1978 when the World Intellectual property Organisation (WIPO) began the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT), the US has always been the number one innovative nation on earth. But China ended the reign of the US in 2019 as the number one international patent filer. In 1999, WIPO received just 276 applications from China (same year America had 149,825 IP), but in 2019 China's number increased to 58,990, a 200-fold increase in just two decades. America, on the other hand, dropped to 57,840 in 2019. IP is the heart, kidney and liver of global competitiveness. It is an indicator of where the new drugs, new technologies, new solutions to global challenges will come from. America is not even among the top four countries in the Patent applications by GDP. South Korea tops the list with 8,561 patents followed by China with 6,183, while Japan and Germany occupy the 3rd and 4th positions respectively.

Add to all the preceding is the biggest fire of them all – Defence. According to the Pentagon, China has now outstripped the US in the number of warships, land-based missiles and defence systems. According to Admiral Charles Richard, Commander of the US strategic Command, "I get apprehensive that we are not fully conscious as a nation of the threats we face. China now has the capability to directly threaten our homeland from a ballistic missile submarine. That's a pretty watershed moment". The Pentagon confirmed that China now has the largest navy ship in the world with 350 war ships, and it is building another 360 while also planning to have a permanent base on the moon for military and commercial opportunities. America's Navy, on the other hand, has a battle force of only 293 warships.

America's implosion will alter the world's balance of power and terror completely. The Renegades will take over the football field as China becomes the world's Class Captain, Russia and Iran become the linesmen, while North Korea, Afghanistan and Pakistan will serve as Technical Coaches

But then, what should America do to gain stability in the midst of these storms?

One, America urgently needs the equivalent of what one might call a STEM-CELL OPERATION. Healthy stems cells need to be urgently transplanted into the economic bone marrow of the US. For 100 years, America's emphasis has been on WALL-STREET to the detriment of MAIN-STREET. Meanwhile, China's source of strength is in lifting 800 million Chinese into wealth within 30 years, and it is planning to lift another 600 million between now and 2030. Conversely, America's emphasis is on the ONE PERCENT that dominates Wall Street. That's the source of the present disequilibrium in the US which is threatening the society's fabric and national cohesion to its foundation.

Two, America urgently needs a Developing Country-type pre-election solution to escape a catastrophic post-election crisis in November, 2020. The few respected Statesmen left, like the 97-year old Henry Kissinger, and the 95 year old Jimmy Carter, should be tapped to use their moral weight and political capital to call for a truce meeting two weeks to the election between the leaders of both political parties. The Elder Statesmen should prevail on both President Trump and Vice-President Biden and their fanatical followers to let peace reign before, during and after the election. They should get them to sign an accord openly to accept the result of the election in good faith in accordance with time honoured US tradition.

Three, the Black-Lives-Matter question needs a wholesale and practical solution from the American Government. In a country where 13% of the population (38 million African-Americans)

complain that the system is rigged against them in the last 400 years, there can be no peace. And without peace, development will be stymied. If America could devise a Marshall Aid Plan through which about $18 billion was pumped into Japan between 1946-1952 to rebuild post-war Japan, there is no reason why America cannot come up with what I would call: *TRUMP ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS (TEEAA)*. Through this, it can dedicate *$1 trillion* for the exclusive reconstruction of African-Americans' businesses, of which about 41% have been destroyed by the COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown.

TEEAA will be one huge way of finally burying the ghost of slavery and its negative psychological impact on African-Americans, and demonstrate in practice that Black-Lives-truly-Matter. The Trump Administration can identify and partner Africa-focused NGOs and companies both in the US and Africa that champion the cause of Africans in diaspora, like One Africa Initiatives (OAI), 2063 SOLUTIONS, and AFRICA 2063 to help those Africa-Americans who desire to relocate to Africa.

CONCLUSION

America's sky is getting dark, but it becomes visible only when one connects the dots. The human tendency is to ignore, deny or gloss over obvious facts until the last instant. It was luxuries like air conditioning, music, wine and over-confidence that ultimately terminated the Roman Empire's life. With maximum fun, their windows were shut, they couldn't hear or see when the barbarians entered the House through the kitchen door. "If there are no cracks in the wall, the lizard won't be able to get in", says an African proverb. Sadly, America's wall is cracked and lizards of different colours, shapes and sizes have entered: Chinese lizards, Russian lizards, and Iranian lizards among others are all in. However, the greatest threat facing the United States today is not from the many external lizards. Rather, America itself is its own number one enemy.

The Clinton-Obama-Pelosi-Biden Tendency (COPB squads, I call them) should be careful in the way they go about prosecuting their project of retrieving power by all means from President Trump's hands on November 3rd, else they may end up throwing away the child with the bathwater. And history will be harsh on them. Winning the battle and losing the war isn't wisdom. Similarly, President Trump needs to become a magnanimous Statesman else he may end up as another Romulus Augustulus: the last Western Roman emperor.

America is not just another country! The 80:20 rule applies. The US is that 20% core that keeps the remaining 80% of the world reasonably warm.

America is to the World what heart is to the body.

The human heart pumps blood through the body via circulatory system, providing oxygen and nutrients while simultaneously removing carbondioxide and sundry wastes. America plays similar role in World affairs.

But can we say the same thing about the contender (China) to the throne especially when it comes to removing CO2 and wastes from the world's body politics, wastes like human rights abuse and oppressive governments worldwide, judging by its pedgre?

There is a decline decade for every empire: Roman (466-476), British (1935-1945), USSR (1981-1991). Is 2020-2030 America's decline decade? It depends on the American elites-their choices-in the next six months.

William Blake is right: “the foundation of an empire is art and science. Remove them or degrade them, and the empire is no more. Empire follows art and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose”.

Good morning, America? Or is it, Good night, the United States? Pick your choice.

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