

# Decline and Fall

How not to act like a great power.

BY IRWIN M. STELZER

**A**MERICA IS FINISHED as a great power. Not because it no longer possesses the resources, but because it has lost the will. That was brought home to me on both ends of a recent trip through London's Heathrow airport en route to Phoenix.

• **No great power permits its citizens to be discriminated against.** Yet just keep your eyes open as you go through security at Heathrow (or any other international airport). Off goes your jacket. Off comes your wife's jacket, like yours, to be deposited in a heap in a plastic bin headed through a machine designed to detect something or other. Next comes a Middle Eastern woman, clad head to toe in a black garment, loose-fitting enough to conceal a weapon of mass destruction. No one dares impede her progress through the detectors.

America makes no move to tell the world's authorities that its citizens are not terrorists, and that any sensible program based on statistical probability—some call it profiling—would reverse security priorities. Jimmy Carter proved that any third-rate power can lay hands on American citizens without consequences. The world got the clue, and now treats us accordingly.

• **No great power would allow itself to be held hostage to desert kingdoms run by medieval theocracies.** Yet America does. We land in Phoenix and hop into a car that can be brought to a screeching halt if our supplies of oil are cut off. So we are afraid to tell our Saudi suppliers to stop financing terrorists, and

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to stop polluting the minds of their young with anti-Semitic, anti-Western rants. We allow Russia, a country with a GDP less than that of Italy but with lots of oil, to tell us to take a hike when we protest its increasing tendency to return to the good old days of a KGB-dominated society. After all, if we support democratic

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forces in Russia, Putin might divert his oil and gas to China instead of giving us the privilege of buying it at inflated prices.

Instead of doing what a great nation would do—take steps to stem the flow of our dollars to what Reuel Marc Gerecht aptly described in these pages as “the Saudi Wahhabi multitentacled missionary-money machine, still the most influential conveyer of anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and anti-Christian hatred in the world”—we unleash our secretary of energy to beg the OPEC nations to please let the price of oil

drop from an outrageous \$70 per barrel to a merely extortionate \$60, but most important, please don't cut us off. And, by the way, you have us so much under your thumb that we will send our fleet to protect you should terrorists threaten your oil facility at Ras Tanura. But if our sailors pull a Bible in their duffles, look out. Groveling is easier than paying the price of getting off oil.

• **No great power loses control of its borders.** We have. The beautifully tended lawns of our Phoenix hotel, its well-staffed kitchen, are as likely as not the work of illegal aliens. These are admirable, hard-working people for the most part. But they are here illegally. And so unsure of itself has America become that we feel a need to adjust to them—to their language, to their demands on our social services. And most come from a country that refuses to allow American firms to invest in its oil and gas industries so as to increase available supplies. Surely a great country would find some way of saying, “No oil, then no immigrants, no remittances.” Never in history have so many illegals dared to organize protest marches and assembled in so easily arrestable a mass, secure in the knowledge that their host country's addiction to low-cost pool-cleaning trumps its desire to control its borders.

• **No great nation allows itself to become dependent on the goodwill of hostile nations in order to carry out its foreign policy.** Yet America is rattled when left-wing governments in Spain and Italy withdraw support for our attempt to establish a government in Iraq that does not support terrorists. Earlier this month in London, a coalition of Welsh and Scottish peacemongers enlisted the support of opportunistic and anti-American Tories—the party of Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher—to come within a whisker of passing a parliamentary motion that would have made it even more difficult than it now is for Tony Blair to stick with us in Iraq. Would the government of a great power have received these

same Tories in Washington only a few months ago, giving them much-needed credibility at home?

- **No great power allows others to insult it gratuitously.** I happened to be in America when one of our leading universities—housed in the safety of nuclear-free Cambridge—gave a platform to Iran's former president, and in Britain when St. Andrews gave him, get this, an honorary doctor of laws, no doubt a morale-killer for the political prisoners rounded up during his tenure. Yet we continue to pour government funds into Harvard to appease Ted Kennedy, and our ambassador to the Court of St. James's said not a public word to the Brits about their taste in honorees.

- **No great nation allows itself to get into hock to a potential enemy.** Yet we owe hundreds of billions to the Chinese because we don't have the nerve to tell them to get the value of their currency in line with market forces or keep their sneakers, toys, and television sets. And no great nation stands idly by while another pilfers billions of dollars worth of its most valuable product—its intellectual property. Yet we watch while DVDs of first-run, copyrighted American films are sold for \$1 in Beijing even before the film has been released in theaters here at home.

There's more. But you get the idea. Travel the world with your eyes open and you will see that America is no longer a great power. Not that it can't still be one—with our astonishingly lethal soldiers, our daring entrepreneurs, our workers willing to put in long hours, and a productive economy that is still the envy of the world.

But so long as we prefer to fund shopping sprees rather than a military adequate to meet the challenges of our era, and so long as we allow uncertainty about our virtues as a nation to swamp our good judgment, we will continue to doff our jackets obligingly to security personnel who are surprised—just ask them—that we allow our people to suffer such indignities. ♦