



In 1945, after long experience of Anglo-Soviet anti-Nazi co-operation, the British Chiefs of Staff realised that Russia would respect only strength as the basis for any future relationship. This mirrored Lord Palmerston's view, almost a century earlier: *"The policy and practice of the Russian Government has always been to push forward its encroachments as fast and as far as the apathy or want of firmness of other Governments would allow it to go, but always to stop and retire when it met with decided resistance and then to wait for the next favourable opportunity."*

Not much has changed, writes Dr Julian Lewis.

If anyone had doubts about Russian responsibility for the Salisbury poisonings, the contemptuous failure to respond to Theresa May's 24-hour deadline should swiftly have dispelled them. An innocent regime would have rushed to explain how a nerve agent which only it produced could have been acquired and employed by anyone else. We should have been spared sarcastic suggestions in the Russian media that the United Kingdom is 'an unsafe place for traitors to settle', as well as ludicrous claims that we were behind the deadly attack. That was a charge straight from the stable of 'the Jews organised 9/11' and 'US Intelligence assassinated Kennedy'.

Vladimir Putin is a product of the KGB, schooled in the suppression of captive countries, steeped in the culture of Communist domination, and filled with regret that the Soviet Empire

imploded. According to him, its break-up was "the greatest disaster of the twentieth century" – a revealing and curious choice, when compared with the millions killed by two world wars, the Russian civil war, forced collectivisation, mass deportation and the oppression of the gulag.

Until the Bolshevik Revolution, there was some chance of Russia evolving along democratic lines. Then the cancer of Marxism-Leninism gave psychopaths and dictators their ideological excuse to seize total control. Their opponents were denounced as 'enemies of the people' and put, or worked, to death with no semblance of due process. Now that the ideology has gone, the ruthless mind-set remains. Russian leaders no longer claim to be building a Workers' Paradise, but they still believe that Western capitalists will sell them the rope with which to be hanged.

For 40 years from 1949, two factors ensured the containment of Russia and the maintenance of peace. One was the deterrent power of Western nuclear weapons; the other was the collective security provided by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. No longer could an aggressor attack small European states without the Americans immediately entering the war.

Yet, such preparedness did not come cheaply. In the early 1960s, UK Defence spending accounted for 6 per cent of GDP – the same percentage as Welfare. The current Welfare budget is 6 times the size of the Defence budget. In the mid-1980s, Defence constituted 5 per cent of GDP – the same percentage as Education and Health. The current Education and Health budgets are respectively 2.5 and 4 times the size of the Defence budget.

In the changed strategic situation, this cannot be allowed to continue. Since 2016, the Defence Committee has been making the case for a Defence budget target of 3 per cent of GDP – which is what it used to be in the mid-1990s, even after the cuts following the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War. Sir Michael Fallon has called for a 2.5 per cent target by the end of this Parliamentary term. His successor, Gavin Williamson is squaring up for a battle with the Treasury.

It is a fight he has to win – for the safety of us all.

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