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### Articles

# The New Dark Ages?



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6 days ago □ 420

Historians note that one of the signs of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire was the rise of walled cities. Rome was no longer capable of defending its far flung borders from invading barbarians. So cities had to defend themselves by erecting fortifications, becoming fortresses that are popular tourist attractions today, but that then signified the collapse of Roman civilization and the advent of the Dark Ages.

### ***The New Barbarians***

Now Washington under the leadership of President Barak Obama lacks the political will to defeat or deter the new barbarians that threaten Western Civilization:

*—Islamist terrorism is raiding Europe and America, pouring hundreds of fighters and thousands of new recruits, mixed with refugees from the Middle East, across the West's undefended borders. The invasion happens at a time when Western elites suffer from a crisis of confidence in the merits of their own civilization, rejecting Judeo-Christian values and seeking to replace these with a spiritually dead culture of secular humanism and materialism. Islam, not merely a religion but a totalitarian ideology, and its fervent adherents cannot reasonably be expected to assimilate, or even co-exist, with Western secular humanism – the antithesis of Islam. Civilizational suicide by Western elites is well described in George Weigel's book *The Cube and the Cathedral* (2005).*

*—North Korea repeatedly threatens nuclear missile strikes. On February 7, 2016 Pyongyang orbited a second satellite over the U.S. on the optimum trajectory to evade National Missile Defenses and make a high-altitude electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack that could blackout the U.S. electric grid and kill millions of Americans, if the satellite is nuclear armed. For the first time in history, EMP and cyber attacks against electric grids makes it possible for failed states like North Korea, and even non-state actors like terrorists, to destroy the most advanced and successful societies on Earth.*

*—Iran may also be capable of making a nuclear EMP attack on the U.S..* Iran is allied to North Korea and has orbited satellites on similar trajectories. President Obama’s Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA—the Iran nuclear deal) is unverifiable, and failed to verify the past and present status of Iran’s nuclear weapons program, as promised to Congress. The UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), upon which the Obama Administration depends for inspections and verification of the JCPOA, knows only what Iran permits the IAEA to know. The IAEA has access only to overt nuclear sites declared as such by Iran—not to military facilities or many underground sites that almost certainly conceal a clandestine nuclear weapons program. Iran is probably following the example of North Korea that continued developing nuclear weapons clandestinely, even while agreeing to the Agreed Framework that President Bill Clinton promised would prevent Pyongyang from developing nuclear warheads and long-range missiles. Now North Korea has both. IAEA inspections have never been an effective barrier to nuclear proliferation.

*—Russia and China are on the march in Europe and Asia, testing the resolve of the U.S. to defend NATO and its Pacific allies, and waging cyber warfare against the U.S. homeland.* Russia and China are developing and deploying new generations of advanced nuclear weapons and missiles, while the U.S. nuclear deterrent is so old and obsolete that many question its technical reliability – and most importantly its credibility. Recently, Russia boasted it is developing a new heavy ICBM armed with 10-12 new warheads in Maneuverable Re-entry Vehicles (MARVs) that can snake through any missile defenses and destroy, with a single missile, an area the size of Texas or France. This is probably disinformation, intended to conceal the real purpose of the new MARVed ICBM, which is to achieve cruise missile-type accuracy for a surprise disarming first-strike against the U.S. nuclear deterrent. Russia and China also have a virtual monopoly in battlefield nuclear weapons, which the U.S. has mostly dismantled unilaterally, except perhaps for a few hundred aged gravity bombs stored in Europe. Worst, Russia and China have Super-EMP weapons, that could disarm the U.S. with a single blow – and the U.S. has no counterpart to these weapons (which Russia apparently has proliferated, by accident or intentionally, to North Korea). Escalation dominance in the nuclear balance would enable Russia and China to unleash aggression by their conventional forces, perhaps unopposed. Nuclear superiority would also enable them, if necessary, to win a nuclear war. New barbarians, like the barbarians of old, have little regard for such pacifist dreams as “beating swords into ploughshares” or “a world without nuclear weapons” and respect only strength.

### ***The New Black Death***

While new barbarians threaten Western Civilization, the Sun also threatens a New Dark Ages by the advent of a geomagnetic super-storm, like the 1859 Carrington Event. The Congressional EMP Commission, NASA, and the National Academy of Sciences estimate that if another Carrington Event happens today, natural EMP from the Sun could collapse electric grids and life-sustaining critical

infrastructures worldwide, putting at risk the lives of billions.

NASA estimates the likelihood of recurrence of another Carrington Event to be 12 percent per decade, which makes a catastrophic natural EMP likely within this generation or the next.

The greatest threat to the U.S. and Western civilization is an EMP that blacks-out the electric grid for months or years, thereby collapsing all the life-sustaining critical infrastructures – including communications, transportation, business and manufacturing, food and water.

Nuclear EMP attack is the worst threat, because it would cause the deepest damage to electronics and critical infrastructures. But a protracted nation-wide blackout imperiling the existence of civilization can also be caused by natural EMP from a rare geomagnetic super-storm, by non-nuclear EMP from radiofrequency weapons, by cyber attack, and even by terrorists armed with small arms attacking key nodes in the electric grid.

Military doctrine and exercises of Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran indicate these new barbarians have developed a new way of warfare, a Revolution in Military Affairs that combines cyber, sabotage, and EMP attack against electric grids to quickly defeat the West. *Blackout War* (2015), as my book terms it, or “Sixth Generation Warfare” as termed by Russian General Vladimir Slipchenko, would be a war without armies, navies or air forces, a war without conventional battlefields or large nuclear operations as conceived during the Cold War.

Western Civilization is more vulnerable to Blackout War, and will be more surprised, than were the Roman legions when they first encountered Attila’s mounted hordes.

The Congressional EMP Commission, recently re-established by Congress, warns that a nationwide blackout lasting one year could kill up to 90 percent of the American people by starvation, industrial and environmental catastrophes (like firestorms from natural gas pipelines and radioactive plumes from nuclear reactors), and societal collapse.

Thus, natural or manmade EMP, or Blackout War, could be deadlier to Western Civilization than the Black Death or other plagues that depopulated Medieval Europe.

### ***Decline of the New Rome***

The good news is that the EMP Commission proposed a plan in 2008 to protect the national electric grid and the lives of the American people for about \$2 billion (or what the U.S. gives away every year in foreign aid to Pakistan.)

The bad news is that in the 8 years since the EMP Commission submitted its plan to protect the nation's electric grid and other critical infrastructures, the federal bureaucracy has done little or nothing.

Washington's failure to protect the American people from EMP and other potentially catastrophic threats to the electric grid is symptomatic of a general decline in federal competence such that the central government now seems incapable of accomplishing anything. For example:

–The Defense Department wasted \$500 million training an “army” of 50 Syrian rebels, who mostly defected to ISIS.

–Health and Human Services wasted millions of dollars on a website for ObamaCare that does not work.

–The federal bureaucracy cannot protect itself from cyber attacks from Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran.

Once Washington was capable of mobilizing and organizing million-man armies to defeat Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan; of inventing the atomic bomb, nuclear powered submarines, and nuclear electricity; of building a national highway system and sending Man to the Moon.

Now, Washington cannot even tell itself the truth.

Official lies become self-delusions are symptomatic of a civilization in decline—and perhaps about to fall. Official U.S. Government estimates of unemployment, economic growth, illegal immigration – of almost anything politically important – have become so counterfactual as to be worthy of the former USSR.

Consider, for example, a recent U.S. Government Accountability Office report titled *Critical Infrastructure Protection: Federal Agencies Have Taken Actions To Address Electromagnetic Risks, But Opportunities Exist To Further Assess Risks And Strengthen Collaboration* (March 2016). Contrary to its optimistic sounding title, GAO manages to evade admitting that the U.S. Government has failed to implement the EMP Commission's recommendations to protect the national electric grid!

The bottom line is that the national electric grid is still catastrophically vulnerable to EMP, and little or nothing is being done to correct grid vulnerability. The GAO, to its credit, admitted as much during a congressional hearing on July 22, 2015, in public testimony under questioning by Senator Ron Johnson, Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Accountability Committee.

## ***Building Walls***

Fortunately, some states have noticed federal incompetency, and growing threats to the grid, and are moving to protect themselves. Maine, Virginia, Florida, and Arizona have passed legislation or taken other measures to protect their grids and peoples from the catastrophic consequences of a protracted blackout.

Most recently, under the leadership of Texas Governor Gregg Abbott and State Senator Bob Hall, a “Texas Grid Security Summit” convened in Austin (April 28-29). The summit responded to a petition (dated November 2, 2015) from 23 members of the Texas delegation to the U.S. Congress urging Governor Abbott to protect the Texas grid from EMP and other threats.

The congressional letter from Washington appealing to Governor Abbot to protect the Texas electric grid reads in part:

*“We encourage you to take a leading role on an issue of critical importance to our constituents and to our state: the vulnerability of our electric grid and the potential loss of power for millions of American families and businesses...Physical disruptions to the infrastructure, space weather events, cyber-attacks, and electromagnetic pulses (EMPs) are the most significant and pressing threats to our electric grid. It is imperative that we make the grid resilient to all such hazards.”*

Ironic, and alarming, that the 23 Members of Congress who signed the above letter know that Washington is so broken that they hope Governor Abbott can protect the Texas electric grid and save their home state.

The EMP Commission recommended that the national grid be “islanded” – individual states can protect transformers, generators, and control systems within their borders so their “lights will stay on” even if the rest of the nation goes into blackout.

Can the states compensate for the incompetence and lethargy of Washington, and act in time? When the states must “build walls” against EMP attack by the new barbarians, does it portend the advent of a New Dark Ages? Or is it an opportunity to reform federalism, so that governance is again mostly by the states, as was intended by the Founders?

## ***Decline of the West***

Even if nations, states, and cities of the West “build walls” to protect their electric grids and other critical infrastructures from EMP and cyber attacks by the new barbarians, it may be too late to avert a New Dark Ages. Like the barbarians of old who conquered a Roman Empire become militarily weak,

the new barbarians have been given a golden opportunity by NATO's military weakness to crush the Free World through brute force.

Consider, for example, the obsolescence of the U.S. nuclear deterrent – the ultimate security guarantee for the United States and its allies. Nuclear arms dominate the military balance not only because they are the most destructive weapons, but because they are also the most powerful politically and psychologically and shape the mental geography of international relations, casting a shadow of influence over war and peace and even the daily lives of nations.

Indeed, nuclear dominance makes possible conventional military aggression without resort to nuclear arms, and makes possible victory without war -through nuclear blackmail and intimidation.

Accordingly, the rapid modernization and deployment by Russia and China of new generations of advanced nuclear weapons and missiles that have no counterpart in the West, is alarming. The U.S. nuclear deterrent is decades old, decreasingly credible, and there are no near-term prospects of correcting the growing strategic imbalance between East and West in modernity and technological advancement of nuclear weapons:

–The U.S. B-21 next-generation strategic bomber, designed to replace the venerable B-2 whose stealthiness is fast disappearing against new Russian and Chinese radar technologies, will not see Initial Operating Capability (IOC) until, at the earliest, 2020.

–U.S. ballistic missile submarines, the survivable backbone of the U.S. nuclear deterrent, during the Cold War used to number 41, have been reduced to 14 aged Ohios, and will be further reduced to 12 Ohio Replacement Program submarines scheduled for IOC in 2031.

–U.S. Minuteman ICBMs, now decades old and long past their original service life, may be replaced by a new ICBM after 2030, although the Obama administration and Secretary of Defense Ash Carter oppose any new ICBM program.

Thus, a gaping window of vulnerability yawns open in the technological nuclear balance that has no prospects of being closed for many years. What might Russia, China, North Korea, or Iran do with this opportunity?

In the worst case, merely about 50 ICBMs like Russia's SS-18 could make a disarming surprise attack, delivering 500 highly accurate warheads against the U.S. nuclear deterrent's 450 Minuteman silos, 3 strategic bomber bases, 2 ports where half the ballistic missile submarine fleet (7 boats) is normally anchored, and key command and control centers.

Would the 7 Ohios at sea survive the scores of Russian attack submarines hunting them? Would any surviving Ohios be able to receive an Emergency Action Message through a Russian Super-EMP attack? If any Ohios survive and can execute a ragged, uncoordinated retaliatory strike against some Russian missile silos (many empty) and bomber bases (all vacated), what would then be the fate of U.S. cities?

Today, even North Korea, with its 6 KN-08 ICBMs, could potentially destroy the 3 U.S. strategic bomber bases, 2 Ohio submarine ports, and make an EMP attack that could cripple the U.S. nuclear deterrent and civil society.

The waning credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent may account for why Russia, China, and North Korea engage in so much nuclear saber rattling. Sometimes barking dogs do bite.

### ***The New Barbarian Hordes***

The balance of conventional military power between East and West is also alarming.

If Ukraine is annexed or dominated by Moscow, Russia will again directly confront NATO in central Europe. New NATO members Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland are no match for Russia. Nor are traditional NATO members in Western Europe what they were during the Cold War. They are no match for the modernized Russian Army.

Collectively, the armed forces of NATO's 27 members (excluding the United States) seem impressive at about 1.7 million active duty, although this is only about half their Cold War strength of 3.3 million. European NATO (including Turkey) collectively has 6,000 tanks and 2,000 fighter aircraft among 27 member nations.

However, NATO's European members have very little power projection capability – their armed forces are largely incapable of traveling far beyond their national territories. Only the United Kingdom has significant power projection, estimated capable of sending 30,000 troops overseas.

France, after the U.K. estimated to have the greatest power projection capabilities in Europe, had great difficulty projecting even a small force numbering 2,000 Foreign Legionnaires to Mali in January 2013. France needed help with aerial refueling and logistical support from the U.S., Canada, and Britain.

When European NATO led the bombing campaign against Libya in March 2011, they quickly exhausted their ammunition. They needed resupply from the United States.

European NATO was hard pressed to conduct military operations against Libya – a helpless adversary.

Russian armed forces comprise 1.4 million active duty troops, 3,300 modern main battle tanks (18,000 more tanks in reserve), and 2,750 military aircraft.

Russian power projection is superior to European NATO's capabilities to reinforce Eastern Europe. In September 2013, Russia's exercise ZAPAD-13 ("WEST-13") simulated an invasion of Poland and the Baltic states, projecting in a few days to NATO's frontline 22,000 troops (more than the collective active duty forces of the Baltics.)

NATO responded in November 2013 with STEADFAST-JAZZ deploying 6,000 troops (fewer than one-third Russia's ZAPAD-13 deployment) to Poland and the Baltics to simulate repelling a "hypothetical" invader.

Earlier, in July 2013, Russia's largest military exercise since the Cold War projected 160,000 troops and 1,000 tanks across the vastness of Siberia. One Russian "exercise," really a threatened invasion, in a few days deployed 150,000 soldiers to Ukraine's border, more than the 90,000 active duty personnel in Ukraine's entire armed forces.

Arrayed opposite Russia in NATO's frontline are the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) with about 20,000 active duty in their collective armed forces, no main battle tanks, and one fighter aircraft.

If the Cold War returns to Europe, the other NATO frontline states are in little better shape than the Baltics. Among the frontline states Poland is the strongest, with 120,000 active duty and 991 tanks. Collectively, all the East European NATO state (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania) have 214 fighter aircraft.

Overshadowing all these numbers, Russia enjoys a virtual monopoly in tactical nuclear weapons, having an estimated 3,000-8,000.

Unlike the Cold War, when NATO planned to fight defensively in Germany, today's plans require rescuing Eastern Europe. NATO would have to project power eastward, through territory where NATO has never exercised large-scale operations. NATO would have to fight a meeting engagement, or offensive operations against an entrenched Russian Army that fought over and exercised on East European terrain during World War II and the Cold War.

Never during the Cold War did Moscow enjoy such an advantage against NATO's frontline states in conventional and nuclear forces as it does today.



Space will not permit analysis of the conventional military balance between China and the United States. Suffice it to say that the most likely locations for crisis and war are the South China Sea and the Koreas, where China's military capabilities are strongest and most prepared against a weakening U.S. military that must project power across the Pacific.

### ***The New Doomsday***

Average citizens of the West know little or nothing of EMP or the nuclear and conventional military balance of power. But majorities in the United States and NATO nations feel deeply insecure, know from TV and newspaper headlines that the West is in deep trouble, know in their bones that the world order once so favourable to Western Civilization, is imperiled.

Millions in the U.S. and the West are survivalists or "preppers" and there are even popular TV shows dedicated to them.

Elites in the West should heed the wisdom of their people, whose inchoate anxieties about an impending doomsday are probably more to be trusted than the "experts" whose foreign and defense policies have brought the West to the brink of catastrophe. Democracy, after all, is premised on trusting in the collective wisdom of the people.

Interestingly, anxieties over a modern doomsday may account for controversy among historians over whether or not Medieval Christendom panicked over an impending Apocalypse in 1000 AD. Medievalist Richard Landes, who makes a compelling case that the 1000 AD Apocalypse was feared, writes, "There may even be a correlation between wishing to minimize present-day apocalyptic concerns and denying any reality to earlier ones."

Western elites reject as "politically incorrect" such scholarship as Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), preferring to believe, as an article of secular humanist faith, that all differences are negotiable, and if they are not it is the fault of Western imperialism and racism. Yet apocalyptic conquest and collapse of civilization is a recurrent theme in history, known not only to historians, but to anyone who lived through the 20th Century.

The foundational facts and myths of Western Civilization from both its Christian and Classical traditions from ancient Greece and Rome teach that the civilized and the good must be defended. Otherwise, as Roman historian Tacitus writes, "Vae victus (Woe to the vanquished)."

The Bible, the cornerstone of Western Civilization, is replete with histories and legends about civilizational doomsday. Millions of the religious are so fearful about the course of current events, they

believe Mankind is in the “end times” and faces The Bible’s predicted Apocalypse, that some historians interpret as inspired by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and diaspora of Jewish civilization in 70 AD.

Another basic book of Western Civilization, little read today, is the Homeric epic from the Greek Dark Ages about the conquest of Troy, whose refugees supposedly founded Rome, according to Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Virgil describes with poetic imagery the advance of the enemy upon doomed Troy, eliciting feelings of dread recognizable to Everyman today fearful of tyranny and terrorism pounding at the gates of the West:

*Just at the outer doors of the vestibule  
Sprang Pyrrhus, all in bronze and glittering,  
As a serpent hidden swollen underground  
By a cold winter, writhes into the light,  
On vile grass fed, his old skin cast away,  
Renewed and glossy, rolling slippery coils,  
With lifted underbelly rearing sunward  
And triple tongue a-flicker.*

Surely recognizable too, twenty centuries after Virgil wrote, is the violent overthrow of Trojan civilization, symbolized by the murder of King Priam, by means all too familiar in our times — decapitation:

*To the altar step itself he dragged him trembling,  
Slipping in the pooled blood of his son,  
And took him by the hair with his left hand.  
The sword flashed in his right; up to the hilt  
He thrust it in his body.  
That was the end  
Of Priam’s age, the doom that took him off,  
With Troy in flames before his eyes, his towers  
Headlong fallen—he that in other days  
Had ruled in pride so many lands and peoples,  
The power of Asia.  
On the distant shore  
The vast trunk lies headless without a name.*

The West, if it is to avoid King Priam’s fate, needs a new Charlemagne.

*An abbreviated version of this article was published in Family Security Matters (May 12, 2016).*

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Dr. Peter Pry

Dr. Peter Vincent Pry is Executive Director of the Task Force on National and Homeland Security and Director of the U.S. Nuclear Strategy Forum, both Congressional Advisory Boards, and served on the Congressional EMP Commission, the Congressional Strategic Posture Commission, the House Armed Services Committee, and the CIA. He is author of the books "Blackout Wars", "Apocalypse Unknown", and "Electric Armageddon".

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