

Ukraine; a Memorandum.

How ironic it was that two weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine, the Economist published its annual League Table of Democracies showing that only 6.4% of the World's population enjoys the full freedoms and democratic rights which we Brits appear to take for granted. Furthermore, the UK is shown languishing toward the bottom of the table of "Full Democracies", having been overhauled by nations such as Taiwan, a community whose democracy defence analysts agree will be snuffed out by Communist China within three years.

The Economist's report tracking democracy's decline did not appear to receive much publicity. Perhaps few cared. Well, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, everyone should care now. Have we learnt nothing from history? Parallels with events in the late 1930s abound; an isolationist administration in Washington encourages a European megalomaniac who openly sneers at liberal democracy, claims he has no more territorial demands to make, is then shown by his violent invasion of a peaceful neighbour to be a liar, prompting a gut reaction among many of us to wanting to do a lot more than just penalise the aggressor with slow-burning sanctions. In 1939, diplomacy proved worthless and so we did the right, if entirely illogical, thing by declaring war on a belligerent nation far better equipped for combat than were we, thanks to inadequate spending on defence by our appeasement era politicians.

Back then we had an empire. Today, all we have is our membership of NATO which has been weakened by an inward-looking USA and by most of its membership who have consistently refused to meet their obligations to spend 2% of their GDP on defence, **with an estimated total annual shortfall of 89 billion dollars**, a figure which exceeds the UK's entire annual defence spending. Moreover, thanks to decades of cost-cutting by UK politicians of all persuasions, our own defences are pitiful; we now have a tiny "boutique" army, whose main battle tanks have been reduced in number from 1200 in 1990 to 220 today, and which is certainly no longer capable of prosecuting a land war across vast areas of territory.

Perhaps, whatever is claimed, our military is out there. Perhaps we are deploying our own answer to Russia's "little green men", with our own special forces operating under cover in Ukraine armed with weaponry that can deal with those murderous helicopter gun-ships.

But it is all far too little, far too late and we may have to accept that our failure to keep our democracy and defences in constant repair has cost 43 million Europeans their freedom. To make amends, we all need to improve our democracies, bolster our defences and consider upgrading NATO from a regional to a global institution, with a name change - Global Organisation of Liberal Democracies (GOLD) - to reflect its new status, and at the same time endow the transformed institution with a new narrative which draws heavily on NATO's original 1949 Preamble by proclaiming "*to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of our peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law*" Let's hope there's still time.

David Green – February 2022

