

## Fortress North America?

by GWYNNE DYER

Today the United States launched a trade war against Canada, their closest partner and ally, their closest friend, said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on 4 March. At the same time, they're talking about working positively with Russia. Appeasing Vladimir Putin, a lying, murderous dictator.

Make that make sense.

All right, let's try to make sense of it, starting with the obvious fact that the trade war cannot be about what Donald Trump says it's about: forcing Canada to stop a flood of the drug fentanyl that he claims is coming across the border into the United States.

Trump needed some legal excuse to declare an emergency and ignore American obligations under the US-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement, but less than one-thousandth of the fentanyl entering the United States comes in across the Canadian border. Trump abuses everybody, but the particular way he abuses Trudeau is a giveaway.

He habitually addresses Prime Minister Trudeau as Governor, the title given to the chief executive of one of America's fifty states and he calls Canada the 51st state. At first Canadians thought it was just another example of Trump's school-bully style banter, but gradually they realized that there was something sinister behind it.

This is not a joke anymore, Canada's Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly said after Trump activated his threatened 25% tariff on Canadian exports to the US. She took his intention to annex Canada to the United States seriously, she said. She is quite right.

It's as bizarre as Britain annexing Ireland or Germany seizing Austria (both of which did happen in the Bad Old Days), but that's what the current US administration has in mind. For the moment, at least, it intends to do it non-violently, by crushing the Canadian economy in a trade war and picking up the pieces.

Justin Trudeau figured it out, and in his last week in office he felt free to say it out loud. He accused the US president of seeking to bring about a total collapse of the Canadian economy, because that will make it easier to annex us. That is never going to happen. We will never be the 51st state.

Maybe, and maybe not. It's still Donald Trump at the helm, so any US government policy can be reversed overnight (and flip back again by week's end). For example, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said last Tuesday that Trump would probably announce a deal to reduce the anti-Canada tariffs on the Wednesday. (Reduce, not cancel)

You will know whether that is true or not by the time you read this, but it really doesn't matter. All the back and forth, the unkept promises and the sudden cancellations, are just standard Trumpian tactics to confuse the enemy and the enemy is any country that doesn't fall in with Trump's plans. Well, maybe not exactly his plans.

Many people would say that Trump has whims, not actual plans, but some of the people around Trump certainly have plans that make an ugly kind of sense. It's the consolidation of the new American empire, in a world that suddenly starts to look like a cross between the late 19th century and Orwell's 1984.

There will be the spheres of influence of the three superpowers: Oceania (the Americas), run from Washington; Eurasia, run from Moscow; and Eastasia, run from Beijing all perpetually or at least periodically at war with one another. South Asia and Africa will be disputed colonies or borderlands, and that's where most of the wars are actually fought.

I'm not saying that this is the inevitable or even the likely future. However, it is where the behaviour of the three would-be

hegemons, Trump, Putin and Xi, and their multifarious enablers, is leading us at the moment. (To be fair, Xi is less bellicose than the other two.)

Seen in this light, Trump's apparently random enthusiasms for taking over Canada, Greenland and Panama make a kind of sense. He just wants to nail down and fortify the (extended) boundaries of the Homeland. But wait a minute!

What about his plans to expel about two million Palestinians from Gaza and build Trumptown-on-the-Riviera on the ruins of their former homes? Maybe there is no grand plan at all ? or at least none that makes sense to anybody beyond the ?base??

There is certainly a domestic strategy for remaking the United States as an authoritarian ?illiberal? democracy on the Hungarian model. Trump is certainly okay with a ?Christian? republic as well. (Shades of Gilead)

It's also enough to explain his attachment to Putin, even if the Russian dictator doesn't have anything on him. Birds of a feather, etc. But a coherent foreign strategy? Who knows?

I'm tired and my brain hurts. You have a go.