

Publishing Editor's column

WE SEE PLENTY of statistics these days, and sometimes they can be very striking. I was particularly struck recently by a page in *Newsweek's* annual end-of-year publication which gave the top seven countries for annual military spending. It is no surprise to find the USA in the top spot, but the sheer scale of its dominance is breathtaking. The figure for the USA is 528 billion dollars; the next highest, surprisingly, is the UK, at 59 billion dollars. The USA in fact spends more on defence than the next fifteen nations combined.

At this point you might be wondering what is the point of mentioning this here, but think of the implications for our understanding of end-time prophecy. The USA is heavily involved in the Middle East, with two main strands to its policy: protecting its oil interests and supporting Israel. Views may differ regarding the precise fulfilment of end-time prophecy, but one thing is clear: Israel is to be the subject of an invasion by an alliance of nations bent on conquest. As things stand at present such an invasion is unthinkable, for the USA would oppose it and has the military and economic strength to prevent it.

Our traditional and probably still most widely accepted view of latter-day prophecy is that a confederacy of nations led by Russia will invade Israel and will be opposed by a group of powers consisting of the Anglo-Saxon nations allied with the oil kingdoms of Arabia. Yet Ezekiel 38:13 depicts this opposition as a protest, "Art thou come to take a spoil?", rather than military intervention. Joel 3 and Zechariah 14 depict an invasion of "all nations", and whether this is the same invasion as that foretold in Ezekiel 38 (as traditionally accepted) or is an earlier invasion (a more recent view), it is a noticeable fact that neither chapter refers to any opposition to the invasion prior to the Divine intervention that saves Israel.

We have rightly seen much significance in recent years in three developments in world affairs: opposition to the existence of Israel by Islamic nations; the development of a united Europe under strong Roman Catholic influence; and the growing economic power, coupled with a strong nationalistic spirit, of Russia. Should we not now be looking for a major decline in the USA as a world power? The special edition of *Newsweek* magazine referred to above is entitled, "Can America get back on top?". The opening

article refers to the fact that, during the years of George Bush's presidency, America's foreign policy "has provoked enormous international opposition". The thrust of the article, and indeed the whole magazine issue, is, as the title indicates, about restoring American influence in the world. However, America's involvement in Iraq, and increasingly Afghanistan also, is not only vastly unpopular in the world, it is also increasingly unpopular at home. George Bush's successor, especially if it is the Democrat Barack Obama, may well respond to popular opinion and reduce America's involvement in world affairs.

It is on the economic front, however, where the greatest potential lies for a decline in the power and influence of the USA. The crisis last summer over sub-prime mortgages, the lending of money to people regardless of their ability to repay it, illustrates the shakiness of America's financial system, in which large sums of money are made by increasingly ingenious schemes. Under George Bush America has become a major debtor to Asian nations, especially China, and the steady decline in the value of the dollar illustrates America's growing economic weakness, especially considering the rapid growth also in personal debts. A severe economic crisis in the USA would, of course, be worldwide in its effects, and I have referred to the possibility in this column before in terms of how it might affect our lives. In relation to our present theme, such a crisis might result in the USA withdrawing from major involvement in international affairs, creating a situation in which Israel's enemies can invade without fear of American opposition.

The countries best able to survive such an economic downturn will be those with plenty of natural resources, and pre-eminent among these is Russia, whose economy in any case has fewer links to the USA than that of any other major nation. The significance of this for the fulfilment of end-time prophecy need not be spelt out.

I suggest, therefore, that we should look now for a decline in America's power and influence in world affairs. How much of this we shall actually see is another matter, however, for at some stage we shall of course be called to the judgement seat, and the Master warns, "be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Mt. 24:44).

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