

14 March 2022

Revitalized West poised to challenge the narrative of decline



Alistair Burt was Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Minister of State at the Department for International Development from June 2017 to March 2019, and previously Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Middle East from May 2010 - October 2013. Alistair also served as Minister of State for Community and Social Care at the Department of Health from May 2015 until July 2016. He entered Parliament for the first time in 1983, served successively as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State then Minister of State at the Department of Social Security 1992-97, and was Conservative MP for North East Bedfordshire 2001-2019.

It is a truth as honest as it is cruel that the West reacts to a conflict in Europe differently to conflicts elsewhere. Call it what you like, but there is something about a European conflict that stirs memories and fears from coffee shops to Cabinet tables. Maybe it is that we remember Europe's part in commencing the world wars that devastated the 20th century. Or maybe it is because what we thought was confined to grainy black and white newsreel footage is suddenly on our smartphones like it was never meant to be.

The Arab world is entitled to be sore about this. It has had more than its fair share of conflict, in which the West has more often than not played a part. So we should understand a degree of frustration at how the West is viewing the invasion of Ukraine, when contrasted with seemingly less concern at the long-term agony of the Syrian people or the inability to make a priority of ending the war in Yemen as our friends come under renewed Houthi attack.

But there is no status quo in world affairs. What has been happening in recent days is changing our world in a manner not seen for decades. Whatever the outcome of all this, the fact that a nuclear-capable UN Security Council member has invaded a sovereign nation, warned neighboring states about their political or defense ambitions and put its nuclear deterrent on high alert cannot be undone. Whatever we all thought we were dealing with in terms of President Vladimir Putin's Russia, we need to confront this new reality.

Putin's speeches to set the scene for the assault on Ukraine suggested that he sees the modern world not as one of rights and sovereign self-determination, but of empire and hegemonic blocs, in which Russia can only be secure by going back to a time when it dominated its neighbors. This is not the world in which its neighbors, nor anyone else, wants to live. That sound you have heard since the tanks rolled into Ukraine is of free states coming together, suddenly aware — in the

Access. Engagement. Resolution.

midst of the pantomime that democracy sometimes resembles — what it is we stand for and what we risk losing. We are not going to give it up.

This reality presents some challenges for all. While dealing with the immediate crisis, the West is soul-searching what part it may have played in the Kremlin's miscalculation of us. We turned a blind eye to many things, yes, because it suited us, but also in the hope that a rational view of the world would inevitably lead to a conclusion that Russia was under no threat and that its security was as much guaranteed by the free nations around it as anyone else's. We believed that growing prosperity for all and the common threats from terror and extremism that confronted us should have led to more, not less cooperation.

Damaged by experience, the West began to hesitate in the Middle East and North Africa, leading some in the region to question our reliability. Maybe Donald Trump's hostility to NATO was a signal of future neutrality. Perhaps the UK's domestic politics was misinterpreted by Moscow as not the robust determination of government accountability or sovereign decision-making in deciding our destiny with the EU, but some form of weakness.

Putin knows different now. He has defined his response to the freedom of a sovereign neighbor as subjugation, for Ukraine and for anyone else in the region, like Sweden or Finland, who might dare to challenge his view. In response, NATO is stronger in its determination to defend its freely decided membership and the EU is working closely with a UK government that has stepped up to the plate, shutting down the arguments between them and perhaps helping to create the cooperative partnership that must be their only future together.

Further miscalculations should now be avoided. The voice of the Middle East has been quiet this week. Events will have caused late nights in many capitals. The calculation of the West as a declining power, and thus a questionable partner, needs revisiting. Russian leadership has been irrevocably damaged by what has happened. The sanctions it has brought upon its own economy will be damaging, more so than on the West, against which it will retaliate. We will pay the price. Ukraine will never be abandoned to be subjugated.

There are no sidelines in this. The Arab voice needs to be unequivocal in its support of the people of Ukraine and also to call out an invasion for what it is, telling Russia that only partnership leads to both prosperity and security.

This article was published by the [Arab News](#) on 2 March 2022

Access. Engagement. Resolution.

The Ambassador Partnership LLP is a **unique specialist** partnership of former Ambassadors with unrivalled networks of influence in almost 100 countries. We provide discreet services to resolve your international problems and to improve your capacity to operate effectively wherever you need to.

We are **dispute resolution** specialists and **political risk** experts.

To discuss how we can help you to manage your political risk please call:

Tracey Stewart

Partnership Secretary

+44 (0) 7950 944 010

tracey.stewart@ambassadorllp.com

www.ambassadorllp.com