



The Empire and the Five Kings: America's Abdication and the Fate of the World

Bernard-Henri Lévy

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One of the West's leading intellectuals offers a provocative look at America's withdrawal from world leadership and the rising powers who seek to fill the vacuum left behind

The United States was once the hope of the world, a beacon of freedom and the defender of liberal democracy. Nations and peoples on all continents looked to America to stand up for the values that created the Western world, and to oppose autocracy and repression. Even when America did not live up to its ideals, it still recognized their importance, at home and abroad.

But as Bernard-Henri Lévy lays bare in this powerful and disturbing analysis of the world today, America is retreating from its traditional leadership role, and in its place have come five ambitious powers, former empires eager to assert their primacy and influence. Lévy shows how these five—Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, and Sunni radical Islamism—are taking steps to undermine the liberal values that have been a hallmark of Western civilization.

The Empire and the Five Kings is a *cri de coeur* that draws upon lessons from history and the eternal touchstones of human culture to reveal the stakes facing the West as America retreats from its leadership role, a process that did not begin with Donald Trump's presidency and is not likely to end with him. The crisis is one whose roots can be found as far back as antiquity and whose resolution will require the West to find a new way forward if its principles and values are to survive.

The Empire and the Five Kings: America's Abdication and the Fate of the World Details

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From Reader Review The Empire and the Five Kings: America's Abdication and the Fate of the World for online ebook

Gonzalo Corvera says

Un resumen geopolítico interesante

Una apología del imperio estadounidense en boca de un francés que teme la alternativa. Bastante pesimista aunque al final intenta terminar con una nota un poco más positiva.

Dean says

BHL is one of my favorite active practising intellectuals and philosophers.

His latest is a great reminder for those of us who believe in American Exceptionalism and a great reminder that others in the world who are at risk do as well.

America's abandoning the international field leaves it to the revival of the international nihilists of the five kingdoms (Russia, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran). Where life, liberty, and humanity are at risk.

Life, liberty, and fraternity!

Mario Kfoury says

Excellent read on the state of the world today from someone who does not mince his words. Unfortunately, the forces of anti-democracy and obscurantism are numerous, and therefore do not expect more praise than criticism on this masterwork. Hope this awakens some consciousness on the values and foundations of democratic principles: freedoms of expression not action which is anarchy - and equal women's rights.

Todd says

This book could have easily been compacted to the length of an article in the Atlantic. Instead, we are presented with hundreds of pages of the author trying to immodestly impress upon the reader that the author is, indeed, the most interesting man in the world. Although the book was occasionally entertaining and I agree with its basic premise that the Western world and way of life is preferable to the options being presented by ancient kingdoms resurgent, the execution - driven primarily by narrative and literary or philosophical digressions - left much to be desired. Interwoven data would have done much to bolster many of the author's claims and given the book a tone more persuasive than polemical.

Sandi says

This is the authors view of what's happening in the world his view of the USA declining role in the world

Nawar Kassomeh says

It is a very weak book with extremely shaky arguments! Poor references and data to say the least! Our "philosopher" BH. Lévy said in the first chapter of this book: "...the Kurds put their faith in democracy and law, in equality of women and men even on the field of battle". I am not sure if we can call the feudal rule of the Barazani family as a "democracy" and I should remind the readers here that female genital mutilation in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq under the rule of his friend Barazani is very common! He also added in the same Chapter referring to the West : "Kurdistan's historic allies, its sister democracies....""They uttered not a word as Kurdish houses in Kirkuk were gassed and ransacked, women raped, people tortured."

Lévy here is accusing the Iraqi government of gassing the Kurds and raping women during the Battle of Kirkuk!! I've never heard about this before reading his masterpiece! Truly that's an astonishing claim! What proof does Lévy have about the use of Chemical weapons during the Battle of Kirkuk?

Throughout the book, he keeps blaming the West of betraying the Kurds and his "democratic" feudal friend Barazani (ruler of Erbil) but he did not tell us that the Barzani's rival in Kurdistan, the Talabani family (the Kurdish rulers of Sulaymaniyah) supported the Iraqi forces in Kirkuk!

Bettie? says

As seen on Bill Maher

Michael says

A beautifully written, articulate plea for the West (the Empire) to wake up and stand together in the face of the (attempted) rise of the Five Kings: Putin, Erdogan, China, the Saudis, and Iran.

Much of Levy's thinking revolves around the general abandonment by Europe and America of the Kurds, but the malaise he describes is general and pervasive.

Watching current political events, half the population of the UK deciding they're no longer European, Trump devoting his (limited) energies and short attention span to currying favor with despots and those who mean our institutions and traditions nothing good, old empires trying to drape themselves in past glories as a way forward to international hegemony - one can't help but think Levy has a point.

The good news is that he seems to think the various "Kings", attempting to revive their deceased glories (Putin - the USSR, Erdogan - the Ottomans, Iran - the Persian Empire, and so forth) are doomed to failure.

Dan Graser says

This is a complicated time for such a book and a complicated time for the post WW2 world-order that many acknowledge, seems to be fraying. Clearly writing this work for an American audience French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, in very passionate and poetic fashion, tries to make the case for the US to reassert itself on the global stage. Even though I would agree with the point made in jest and attributed to many that, "War is god's way of teaching Americans geography," though of course there is no such thing as a god in any real sense, the position of the US on the global stage has been both marred, self-contradicting, and at times vacant in recent decades.

This is bound to be met with criticism as one of the general ideas that left and increasing portions of the right are coming to agree on is that we need fewer interventionist wars fought with no clear mission, no understanding of the quagmire into which we are stepping, no clear exit strategy, and which inevitable spin out of control to become humanitarian disasters for the region and for our own poorly treated veterans of said conflicts.

That being said, the rise in influence of the five "kings" identified by Lévy - Erdogan's Turkey, Putin's Russia, Xi Jinping's China, Khamenei's Iran, and MbS' Saudi Arabia - created by the vacuum of the US' abdication from the world stage following our recent disastrous endeavors is something which should be of concern and should be addressed. Since our floundering in recent decades there has not been a clear mission for our foreign policy and it seems many are complacent to allow this to continue. Having been so unsuccessful in our recent foreign interventions, there has been a casual isolationism creeping into many discussions of this area. What this work mainly succeeds in doing is making a case for such a vision without beating the bellicose drums of endless war.

There are times when the language and the connections BHL draws become stretched and tenuous, ironically when connecting to the very Biblical story that inspired the title of the work, as well as a bizarre analysis of the work of Bentham, and a pointless tangential and brief discussion of Dante.

What I will say is that this isn't just some imperialist tract that yearns for some imagined past golden age of Western or purely American dominance, rather, it is a brief challenge to complacency in the face of the increasing influence from persons and nations whose ascendance should not go unchallenged by anyone of any political persuasion and anyone possessing a modern notion of liberty, equality, and tolerance.

Bryan says

Excellent reading, very true story

Jonathan says

Excellent book on the state we reached today.

Murray says

A beautiful, and enormously intelligent, rant. *The Empire And The Five Kings* is an exceptional book. Or rather, Bernard-Henri Levy has an exceptional voice; combining equal parts intelligence and poetry. Levy's writing is evocative, almost rousing, and pulls from an enormous breadth of intellectual tradition.

However exceptional its approach, the argument of *The Empire And The Five Kings* is in certain respects lacking. Levy argues personally and emotionally for an interpretation of The Five Kings (China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) that is interesting but ultimately insubstantial. To call them straw men would be appropriate in both figurative and argumentative terms. The greater value lies with Levy's interpretation of America as the West's moral authority (or semi-predicative force!), inheriting its role from a long history of Western culture dating back to the Roman Empire. This is the greatest reason to read the book- and an important call to action- for the Western World's conviction that its moral value deserves to be perpetuated.

Jason Brown says

Hats off for this deep and far look into the gloomy picture our world is heading to

Mbogo J says

Bernard is an eclectic writer who quotes freely from the Bible, the Iliad, Hannah Arendt, the Talmud, some writers you've heard of and some you've never heard before. He has also lived a charmed life, filming documentaries in war torn areas over the years while being involved in global geopolitics. A writer of his ilk should always be given a chance.

In this book, his central thesis was that as America is slowly abdicating its role on the global stage, 5 "kings" namely Putin, Erdogan, Iran's Ayatollahs, President Xi and the House of Saud (i am guessing MBS) are filling the void and in the process trying to resurrect their old empires, the likes of USSR, Ottoman, the Chinese Empire, the Persian empire and I am not sure if the house of Saud had an earlier empire but you get the gist. The thesis has some merit. We all agree that the post WW2 structure is fraying but we do not know what comes next. Bernard provided the answer.

I agreed with him on the central outline of his ideas but his rendition left a lot to be desired. Bernard delivered his points on the sheer force of narrative. There was no data. When he got it right the chapters were a lulu, especially the opening chapters but when he got it wrong the reader got lost in his wandering thoughts trying to torture out a coherent narrative from a chapter that ended up being a litany of his biases . I particularly did not like how he was enamored by America calling it the city on the hill while showing a complete disdain of the other "kings" and their empires. This reeked of a reheating of the cold war propaganda. But Bernard is clever, earlier in the book he challenged the reader to a thought process, where he asked one to take a fair scale and put America's ills on one side and the good that America has done on the global stage on the other side and see where the scale tilts. When you do this you realise how you tilt the scale reveals more about your biases rather than an unassailable answer of America's goodness or badness,

and so you allow Bernard a leeway to praise America endlessly while calling the new empires ghosts and some other demeaning names.

I will issue a qualified recommendation for this book, it has a lot of original thought but its rendition and lack of data open it up for a lot of criticism. A better take on the topic (well argued with a systematic thought process) can be found in Kagan's *The Jungle Grows Back: The Case for American Power*. I will advise the interested reader to read both books, may be start with Kagan's first then wash it down with this one.

Joe says

The title of this book gives you the premise of the failure of America to lead the world, instead allowing a vacuum to let the other power players to fill the void. This book was a slight challenge for me, as a great deal of it was a reflection of Greek philosophers, Roman poets, German philosophy, and other cerebral figures in history. But there is the emphasis that America needs to set it's ship straight and regather it's moral and values. Bernard-Henri Lévy gives a disturbing analysis.

The United States was once the hope of the world, a beacon of freedom and the defender of liberal democracy. Nations and peoples on all continents looked to America to stand up for the values that created the Western world, and to oppose autocracy and repression. Even when America did not live up to its ideals, it still recognized their importance, at home and abroad.
