

DEFENCE OF THE WEST ON THE LIMES

Colonel Gary H. Rice, Ret.

In Roman times 'the Limes' was the term used for the Roman Empire's system of frontier defences. It marked the Empire's boundaries. The physical Limes were of simple construction, and similar to the fortification that Roman soldiers on the march constructed every evening to protect their camp from attacks. On the outside, a ditch was dug; earth from the ditch was used to build a mound; on top of the mound stakes were planted. The Roman Empire's Limes, in addition, had a deeper ditch, a higher mound, and higher stakes. On some parts of the Empire's Limes, instead of stakes there was a simple wall. Behind the Limes a system of control towers, built of wood or stone, was installed, each within sight of the other, and able also to visually signal to the garrisoned forts that were established several kilometres to the rear.

Contemporarily applied, the term, Limes, as used here, describes not a physical barrier, but a multinational system of collective defence, which includes tactical and strategic aspects, as well as diplomatic, military and economic capabilities. Such a system is comprised not of insurmountable defensive walls such as the Maginot Line,

the wall the State of Israel is now building to guard against Palestinian terrorism, the protective fence that demarcates the Hispanic-Moroccan border in North Africa, or the one the United States is constructing along its southern frontier to deter illegal entrants. In modern terms, today's Limes is conceived of as a permeable barrier that is analogous to the figurative 'line in the sand.' In short, the Limes of a democratic 21st Century society are viewed as those mutually agreed and declared political, social, religious, ethnic, economic, and military benchmarks beyond which no advance will be tolerated.

The Roman Empire's policy of defence on the Limes stemmed from a well thought out and proven Imperial grand strategy that was, on the whole, defensive. The Sahara desert, and the Euphrates, Danube, and Rhine rivers, for example, were the Empire's natural frontiers, and it was exceptional when the Romans launched new campaigns of conquest. When territory was added, it was invariably to shorten the frontier (e.g., the deliberate conquest of the Agri Decumates (the Roman province covering Germany's Black Forest area), or to improve a vulnerable part of the frontier. The underlying goal of the Roman Empire's defence policy was containment and deterrence: wherever an enemy attacked, he would always find a professional, heavily armed Roman force that often outnumbered him. Except for its desert frontier, the Limes usually consisted of a clear line where the enemy had to stay away from (e.g., Hadrian's Wall in today's United Kingdom, or the line of the river Danube). In today's troubled world a similar grand strategy and response capability is needed; however, no one nation or existing

defence alliance possesses either the moral authority or military capability to develop and implement one.

In his 'Annals,' the Roman historian Tacitus tells a tale about two Frisian leaders who wanted to settle their tribe on a river bank opposite the Roman defences, got into troubles with the army, visited Rome to request permission from the emperor Nero, but went home empty-handed. The combination of standing forces on the Limes, and diplomacy, was representative of Rome's defence system as a whole. However, sometimes the line was attacked. When this occurred, Roman soldiers in the watchtowers signalled the invasion to their nearby forts. The watchtowers were usually lost, but the invaders would immediately have to face the Roman forces garrisoning the forts. Almost always, this was sufficient to deal with the situation. When an attacker was able to reach and loot a city, they would be massacred on their way home. The final act of every attempt to attack the empire was Roman retaliation against the invading force and the native population.

Usually, Roman auxiliary troops were sufficient to deter any group of barbarians - as the peoples outside the empire were called - and cope with those savages who did not understand. Only rarely was it necessary to employ the Legions, the backbone of their army. Still, they were the ultimate weapon. The Limes was not an insurmountable bulwark, however, and there were numerous authorized apertures to permit trade between Romans and Germanic tribes. Today, NATO's Limes are in Afghanistan. But in the end NATO will depart and it will fall to the Afghan peoples to defend their own territory. So to it will fall to the

peoples of the free world to secure their lands, and their chosen way of life. The question is, are they prepared to come together and apply a proven strategy such as that of the Roman Empire, and to elect to define and defend their core values on 21st Century Limes?

The answer in this new and dangerous age of failed and failing states, global terrorists, international criminals, and Islamist fundamentalist groups dedicated to bringing about the downfall of the West, is that perhaps the time has come for NATO and other like minded nations to draw closer together and agree to jointly identify the political, social, religious, ethnic, economic, and military benchmarks that constitute their physical and temporal boundaries. These nations would perforce include China, India, and Russia. By formally identifying and promulgating their Limes and their approved entry points in modern terms, these similarly motivated nations would necessarily also be obligated to commit to the development of the joint military, political, and economic capabilities that would be required to defend them, and when required, to collectively demonstrate their political will to apply the political, economic, and military power that may be needed to retaliate when incursions occur.

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