

## A Lesson from History

In 31 BC, Augustus Caesar founded the Roman Empire and proclaimed himself the first emperor of Rome. The first two centuries of the empire saw a period of unprecedented stability and prosperity known as the Pax Romana (“Roman Peace”). During the reign of Emperor Trajan (98–117 AD), Rome reached its greatest territorial expanse. The Roman Empire came to an end in 476 AD, when Romulus, the last of the Western Roman emperors, was overthrown by the Germanic leader Odoacer, who became the first Barbarian to rule in Rome. The other half of the empire, the Byzantine Empire, survived until the fall of Constantinople in 1453 AD. There’s your history lesson for the day.

Historians pretty much agree on the reasons behind the fall of the Roman Empire which can be summarized as follows: invasions by Barbarian tribes; economic troubles and overreliance on slave labor; the rise of the Eastern Empire; overexpansion and military overspending; government corruption and political instability; the arrival of the Huns and the migration of the Barbarian tribes; the spread of Christianity and the loss of the traditional Roman value system; and the weakening of the Roman legions.

In general, however, one of the main reasons for the decline of an empire is its becoming overextended or overstretched, whether by reaching too far, too fast or by being forced, oftentimes through economic need (sometimes greed), to keep on capturing land. In Paul Kennedy’s book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, we read, “[M]ilitary overstretch and a concomitant relative decline are the consistent threats facing powers whose ambitions and security requirements are greater than their resource base can provide for.” Incidentally, some researchers suggest that overconfidence can also be a contributing factor to the downfall of an empire.

It is interesting to see that, in particular, economic troubles and overreliance on “slave” labor, the rise of the *Eastern* Empire, overexpansion and military overspending, and government corruption and political instability all contributed in a major way to the downfall of the Roman Empire. Yes, I’m still writing about the Roman Empire, but I can’t prevent you from making a modern-day comparison and connecting the dots. That’s the second lesson today. But who’s listening?

Long live Palestine!

**Sani Meo**  
Publisher

