

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.

– Charles Swindoll, US theologian

Opinion & Analysis

Ukrainian crisis – a question of the world's future

What is the rational course to take? Should we continue to be driven by warmongers?

Anatol Zukerman

SO WE have a new global reality: The Crimean peninsula belongs to Russia again. Ukraine is effectively split between the East and the West, as far as the two populations desire.

Meanwhile, the Syrian government is winning the civil war, while the Taliban is winning its war against the US.

Rather than engaging in a political blame game, as is the inclination in Washington ("It's all Bush's fault. No, it's Obama's!"), we should step back and take a broader look. If we do that, we would discover US foreign policy of the past two decades has been a failure on a bipartisan basis.

The recent invasions and incursions by "the West" in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Syria and other countries of the Arab Spring resulted in disastrous consequences. Fanatical warriors from Taliban and al-Qaeda to – as we may soon learn – Ukrainian neo-Nazis have made the democratic cure worse than the dictatorial disease.

That evidence-based assessment doesn't seem to concern the US and its foreign policy establishment. It now seems keen on poking the Russian bear – until the bear reacts and a new confrontation develops.

There will be those who are shocked by this statement but let me remind them about the 2001 "Rose Revolution" in Georgia and the 2004 "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine. Neither event improved those countries' economies, strengthened democracy or reduced corruption.

On the contrary, those "revolutions" further damaged the middle class, enriched oligarchs and split their societies into two camps, if not belligerent classes. The new revolution in Ukraine reincarnated the ogre of Stepan Bandera, a Nazi collaborator who killed Jews and Poles during World War II. The West is playing this development down and looking the other way. Russia, on the contrary, is playing the right-wing extremism up. It uses it as an argument to return Ukraine to the fold of the Russian empire.

The West imposed economic sanctions on Russia – and declared the Crimea referendum illegal. But who is "the West"? Is it the US, which encourages democratic revolutions around the world – as long as those revolutions are friendly to the US? Or is it the EU, which tries to expand its market into the East? Or do they act in tandem?

What do toiling masses of the West want? Most Americans don't want to spend their tax money on foreign wars and revolutions. "Let them duke it out; it's not our business, we have problems in our own land." Most Europeans are not crazy about wasting tax money on foreign affairs either.

But the West's military-industrial barons and their hired politicians do a very good job of leaving no opportunity untouched to beat the drums of conflict acceleration.

Some Washington think tanks, such as

the American Enterprise Institute, sponsored to a considerable extent by defence interests and arch-conservatives, have always gone on the warpath, calling for "boots on the ground".

Do they care if the boots on the ground become the graves in the ground? I think not. It is as if they suffer from a case of convenient, but dangerous, amnesia. After all, the recent US-driven "boots on the ground" episodes in Iraq and Afghanistan, pushed incessantly by the same group of "think tanks", didn't go so well.

If Russia and America want to save the world, they should stop fighting and start co-operating

Unperturbed by reality, US neocons continue to play violent geo-political games for their own advantage. In their myopic vision, they always rush to the next fight – and they don't even care if they win it, as long as they get paid for their "strategic-thinking" and propagandising. Business is business, after all.

One wonders, are they engaging in these arguments to do their sponsors' bidding – to continue their personally very comfortable lifestyle as an armchair warmonger? Mind you, these fine strategists always call on others to go into war.

Undoubtedly, the Ukrainian question is bigger than Ukraine. It is a question of the world's future. It would be an overstatement to say Russian President Vladimir Putin's effort to restore Russia's superpower status leads us back to a bipolar world – Russia and China in one camp the US and EU in the other.

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The key issue now is to make sure one understands Putin's Russia, unlike the old Soviet Union, is not belligerent to the capitalist system. The reason is simple. It cannot afford to do anything else. Its global share of GDP – at around 2 percent – is far too small. Plus, Russia is essentially a commodity exporting state and depends on the graces of its customers.

The task ahead is to make sure Russia can deal with the rest of the world, as well as China. Yet, the Washington establishment acts in order to get the rest of the country to see Russia, once again, as the US's "main geo-political foe".

The US claims to be the great democracy-exporting country – even though it has a historical record of collaborating with foreign dictators such as Ngo Dinh Diem of Vietnam, the Shah of Iran, Ferdinand Marcos of Philippines and the kings of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan.

To be sure, Russia is also hypocritical. Domestically, it practises "limited democracy" and calls its new tsars "presidents". Internationally, it sells weapons to the dictatorial Iran and Syria.

But let's call a spade – both countries vie for world domination and both fail domestically, although to a different degree. US democracy is limited because big corporations unduly influence the government. Generally speaking, the Russian government controls the oligarchs, while in the US, its "oligarchs" – aka big corporations – control the government.

Meanwhile, extra caution is needed. The writing on the wall is clear for all to see. The twin epidemics of searing national and religious conflicts is moving us ever closer to bring the world to the brink of anarchy. That, in our time of nuclear proliferation, could be catastrophic.

If Russia and America want to save the world, they should stop fighting and start co-operating. The two powers can begin with Ukraine. Historically, like it or not, this country belongs to Russia – and it began as Russia more than 1 000 years ago. To paraphrase the famous words by Winston Churchill, Russians and Ukrainians are the same people separated by a common language.

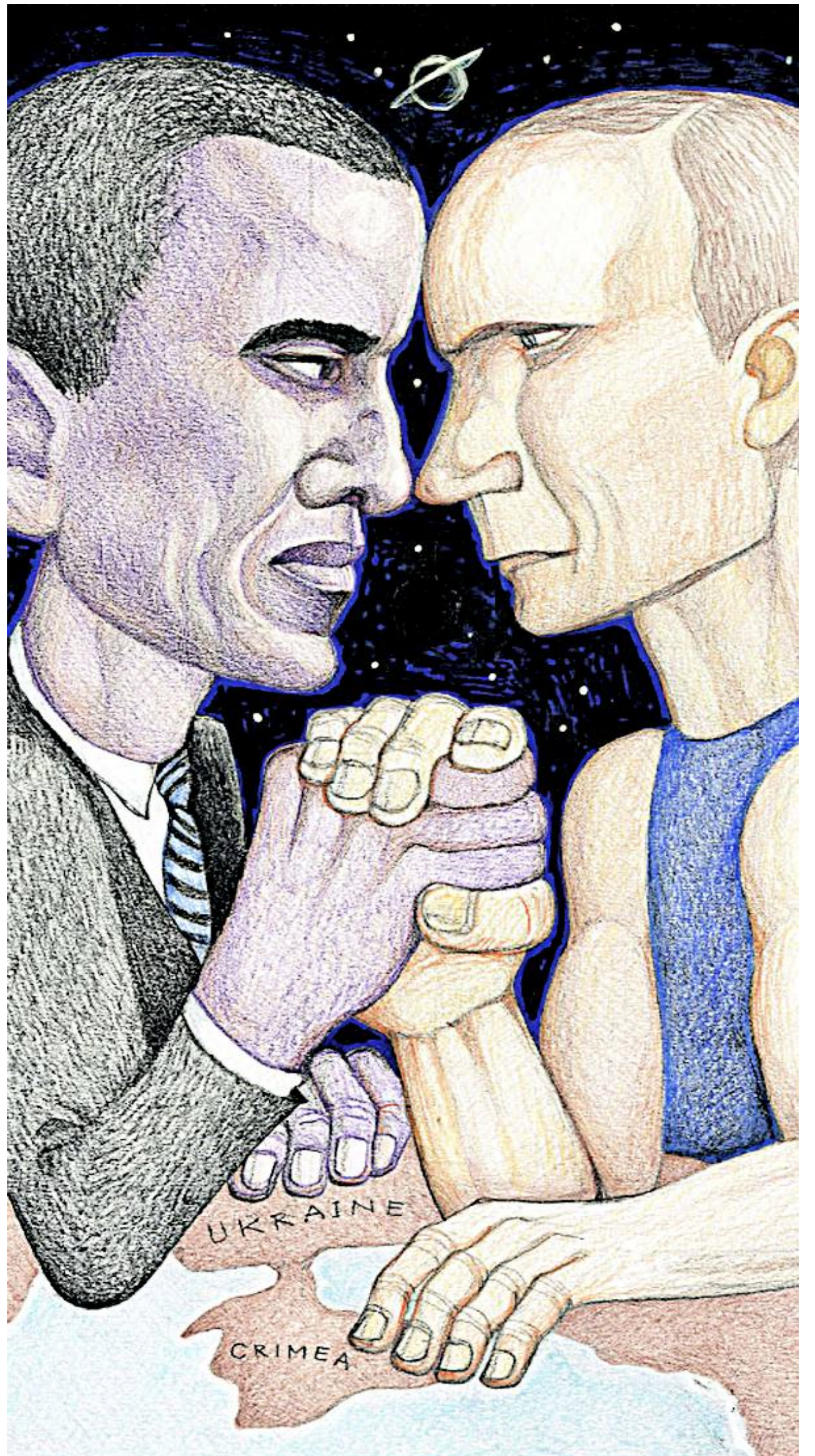
The EU is also a key actor in this situation. And it above all must realise that to chisel all of Ukraine from Russia is to hurt all three parties in this equation. Ukraine would remain a failed state, because it needs systemic changes, not financial bailouts. Too much rashness on the part of the EU would mean it would lose the Russian oil and gas supply and would have another failed state on its hands, in addition to Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

The potential resulting military confrontation would be more intense and might bring the entire region to another war. Yulia Tymoshenko, the former prime minister of Ukraine and an oligarch herself, has already threatened to annihilate Russia with nuclear weapons.

So far, the poked Russian bear has woken up twice in this century, the 21st – once in Georgia and once in Ukraine – and both times the bear won those chess matches and added to his territory.

Perhaps, it's time to stop poking the bear and collaborate with him to solve the global problems of terrorism, anarchy, the distraction of natural environment and nuclear proliferation. Perhaps, the EU can act as an effective arbiter in this process.

Anatol Zukerman is a Russian-born political artist and an architect in the US. Editor's Note: This article is published with permission from theGlobalist.com. Follow theGlobalist on Twitter @theGlobalist



'Obama and Putin Wrestle Over Ukraine' by Anatol Zukerman (acrylic on canvas) 2014

African values can help business respect the environment

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Matome Modipa

IN THEIR book, *Transient caretakers: making life on earth sustainable*, Mervyn King and Teodorina Lessidrenska demonstrate that the sustainability of Earth is threatened by irresponsible corporate citizens. King and Lessidrenska are regarded among the leading global experts on corporate governance and sustainable reporting.

Among others, some firms are endangering the environment through carbon emissions, depletion of natural resources, ocean dumps, hazardous waste, industrial waste, deforestation and nuclear waste. Other than compelling companies to act responsibly through legislation and regulatory requirements, companies should be taught and be encouraged to embrace the African values of Letsema.

The concept of Letsema originates in the African tradition of volunteering one's labour to community projects. It is also

linked to old African adages that say: "Two heads are better than one", and: "A single finger cannot remove fluff".

In terms of the African communal model, development is seen as the movement or progression of the community, group or individual from their current socio-economic status to the desired one. Development is the responsibility of the individual in the first instance, and is supported by others as a group or a community.

The development of the individual is the result of the joint efforts and contributions of everyone in the community and outside the community. Whenever one person succeeds, it is the community that succeeds and the individual feels obliged to give back to the community that has empowered him. This entrenches a sense of responsibility and unity in the community. When an individual has a vision to achieve, he or she needs the community to support, develop and grow that vision in order to benefit the individual and the community as a whole.

Collaboration in Letsema is not just about teamwork among community members, but it also entails a partnership with the land, rivers and nature at large. To this end, Basotho people have an old saying that says: "Re seng: We are all related, all humans and non-humans."

The significant aspect of this view is the web of relationships that constitute the whole. The African people's history of the land and indigenous farming practices are entrenched in the Letsema values and put an emphasis on the relationship, interdependence, reciprocity and collaboration of nature and people. Working jointly to plough each other's fields or doing joint community work collaboratively brought a strong sense of rootedness and an aspect of belonging among African people.

Other than individuals working together jointly, Africans have always viewed the land as one of their collaborators (a patriot). This view is illustrated by Mathabo Tsepa (2008) who wrote: "The elders stories illustrate that food such as sorghum is central to maintaining the relationship between people and their lands. The connection among people, land and food is brought to life through the traditional farming practices that involve Letsema. Direct participation with the land and growing food appears to establish and maintain a context for respecting the land."

"As elder Maleshonae points out, 'respecting the land, these crops and all that goes with it is not something you can learn sitting in your hut... you go to work with land, or seeds, or the crops or whatever it may be. In the long run, that interaction and communication you have

with your crops and the land lead to developing respect."

Unlike contemporary entrepreneurs who respect the environment due to regulatory enforcement of integrated reporting, indigenous African entrepreneurs cared about nature many centuries ago due to their appreciation of the Letsema values (collaboration with environment).

It is important to note that Letsema is not just an empty metaphor, but a way of life that emphasised the significance of the Africans maintaining caring relationships with the environment while working on the land to provide food security.

Through storytelling and oral history, Africans taught their next generations the importance of maintaining interconnectedness with nature by practising traditional farming methods. Among others, this included promoting biodiversity and protecting insects, birds, fish and animals.

The Letsema values discouraged greed; one only had to take what was sufficient for the family and give back to the land through traditional fertilisers (animal dung). This compost would rejuvenate the land that had become tired of production to become fertile again. This demonstrated the Africans thanksgiving and giving back to nature.

Mathobo Tsepa wrote about how the

Basotho would appreciate their interconnectedness and interrelatedness by leaving some of the sorghum in the field during harvest as a way of giving back to the land and earthworms.

Unlike contemporary entrepreneurs... indigenous African entrepreneurs cared about nature many centuries ago due to their appreciation of the Letsema values.

Moreover, surplus sorghum is fed back to the cattle, and the resultant cow dung is deployed on to the fields as manure to enrich the soil.

Letsema values instilled the sense of responsible and sustainable farming among the Africans. It became the reservoir of African indigenous knowledge long before there were academic journals on biological diversity.

Actually, in the absence of environmental and farming publications, Africans regarded nature as a greater teacher who would guide them on how to relate respectfully with the environment.

It is sad to note that due to the dearth of indigenous story-telling, Africans have largely lost the Letsema value, which was the foundation for community well-being and the collaboration among people, and between humans and nature. If current entrepreneurs and other business people could embrace the Letsema values, malfeasance such as the poaching of rhinos and environmental degradation will be mitigated.

In the same vein, I posit that the negligence of decommissioned mining shafts and the escalation of acid water would be reduced if the Letsema values were embraced.

If corporate entrepreneurs can implement some of the values espoused in this treatise, our companies shall become better corporate citizens.

The inference is that Letsema can help us execute our role of being responsible caretakers of the Earth, so that future generations can inherit a better place to live and thrive.

Modipa is the founder and executive chairman of Sebata Group