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EDITORIAL

Reality check for Mideast and U.S.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry’s ambitions have run into the bitter reality of Middle East politics. After hitting the latest wall in his effort to forge a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, Kerry announced that “it is reality check time” for whether negotiations can succeed.

Kerry is rightly frustrated, given the obstinacy of the two parties for which he is trying to mediate. If they do not want peace, and are not prepared to work to achieve it, then there is little Kerry, or the United States — or anyone — can do.

Since replacing Hillary Clinton as secretary of state a little over a year ago, Kerry has focused on the Middle East. Many believe that he sees a peace deal as the cap of his political career. The energy he has invested in that project suggests that the speculation is correct: He has made more than a dozen trips to the region since taking office, and twice detoured around his tour of Europe to handle recent difficulties.

The latest round of talks began nine months ago after a three-year break, with a series of meetings designed to build trust and confidence. Among them was the agreement by Israel to release over 100 Palestinian prisoners.

Last week the fragile process broke down when Israel refused to release the last 26 prisoners unless Palestinians agreed to continue negotiating beyond the original April 29 deadline, and announced public tenders for 700 apartments in East Jerusalem. In response, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas signed applications to join 15 international treaties, reneging on his promise that Palestine would not take the unilateral path toward international recognition, a process that he suspended when the talks resumed last summer.

In an attempt to salvage the talks, Kerry pressed Israeli to release the last 26 prisoners, as well as 400 others to be selected by Palestinian authorities, and slow the construction of settlements outside Eat Jerusalem. In exchange, the Palestinians would not pursue their statehood bid unilaterally and agree to extend the talks into 2015. In addition, Kerry has reportedly offered Israel the release of Jonathan Pollard, a spy for Israel who has been imprisoned in the U.S. since 1985.

The Pollard offer is both original and controversial. Every Israeli government has pleaded for Pollard’s release and every U.S. president since Ronald Reagan has refused to make that gesture. It is betting that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is eager to gain credit for Pollard’s release. Pollard,

uip for parole next year, is reported ill. Some reckon that he will be released on health grounds and this is one way of getting something from Israel. Many in the U.S. intelligence community vehemently oppose any clemency for him and most analysts doubt that it will influence Netanyahu’s thinking.

Kerry has called for a time out while all three sides evaluate their options. All have declared their commitment to the peace process. Israelis say their refusal to release the prisoners was a response to Palestinian obstinacy, omitting the fact that the Palestinians had adhered to all agreements. Palestinian officials say Abbas did not intend to sabotage the negotiations with his move, but merely sought to draw attention to Israeli behavior. Israeli officials counter that the escalating list of Palestinian demands — including the lifting of a blockade on the Gaza Strip and freeing high-profile prisoners — suggests that Palestinians are not serious about negotiating .

Kerry has said that the U.S. is going to re-evaluate its role as mediator. Washington is right to do so. There are many other crises in the world that demand Kerry’s time and attention. The U.S. cannot want a deal more than the parties to the negotiation. Neither should think that the U.S. will do its work for them. Both must be ready to strike a deal and that means making the compromises that are necessary to find common ground. Both sides must feel some pain.

At the same time, however, they also believe that the U.S. cannot afford to just walk away from the talks. Kerry has invested too much of his time and prestige in this effort. A decision to turn his back would look like yet another show of U.S. fecklessness, a lack of determination and commitment.

Neither can the world afford the likely conflicts that would follow from another failed round of talks. Last week, Palestinians fired rockets at Israel, which replied with air attacks on military targets in the Gaza Strip. Some believe that another intifada — the last of which produced thousands of deaths — could result if talks break off.

The risk of yet more violence is probably the best spur to negotiations. Netanyahu and his supporters may believe that they can inflict more pain on the Palestinians than they will have to suffer, but that is no recipe for enduring peace. It is indeed time for a reality check.

Both Israelis and Palestinians should assess their dwindling options and acknowledge that a negotiated settlement is much better than their unilateral options.

THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Rising hatred among Northeast Asians

KYODO

Mutual hatred among Korean, Japanese and Chinese people has risen to a worrisome level. This is no doubt a cause for concern not only for those who strive for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia but also for anyone who wants this world free from additional troubles.

According to an opinion poll conducted by Japan’s Asahi Shimbun on 4,000 Northeast Asians in the past two months, 67 percent of Koreans said they disliked Japanese people against only 4 percent who liked them. Similarly 34 percent of Japanese revealed their hatred of Koreans, four times higher than the 8 percent who showed favorable feelings toward the latter.

Between Japanese and Chinese people, the shares of respondents who expressed antipathy against each other

stood at 51 percent and 74 percent, respectively, while only 4 percent and 11 percent gave positive, replies.

The result, especially the increased number of Korean people who dislike Japanese, is not very surprising given what Japanese leaders have done in the past couple of years. Yet the mutual abhorrence is alarming, as we thought the aggravation of relationships was mostly between the governments and populist politicians of the two countries — not ordinary citizens. The same can be said of the Japanese-Chinese relationship.

Responsible political leaders, and all people with sound sense, should not let the regional aversion continue much longer. It would of course be best if nationalistic Japanese leaders, led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, changed their attitudes and behavior.

However, such expectations have long

become wishful thinking in South Korea and China. It is difficult for Koreans to hold their hand out to Japan, especially its unrepentant leadership, not least because tolerance on the part of the weaker side could appear as cowardice.

Yet nothing would be more foolish for Seoul than to antagonize the whole of Japan, including its intellectuals and the two-thirds of Japanese citizens who oppose Prime Minister Abe’s attempts to revise the constitution and exercise the right of collective self-defense.

Equally important is to engage Japan with cool, rational dialogue. Instead of taking sides with Beijing or Tokyo in turn, Seoul should mediate between the two global powers with the cooperation of its most important ally, the United States. It should put long-term prosperity ahead of short-term pride.

The Korea Times, Seoul (April 10)

Putin invades, Obama dismantles

KYODO

John Kerry told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday that “Russian provocateurs” had infiltrated eastern Ukraine in order to foment “an illegal and illegitimate effort to destabilize a sovereign state and create a contrived crisis.”

Also on Tuesday, the Pentagon announced steep cuts to U.S. nuclear forces, four years ahead of schedule, in accordance with the 2010 New Start treaty with Russia.

Russia has seized Crimea and has 50,000 troops as a potential invasion force on the border with eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin is also abrogating the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, in which Kiev agreed to give up its nuclear arsenal — at the time the third-largest in the world — in exchange for guarantees of its territorial integrity from Russia, the U.S. and U.K.

The Kremlin is also violating the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which bans the testing, production and possession of nuclear missiles with a range between 310 and 3,400 miles. Russia has tested at least three missiles — the R-500 cruise missile, the RS-26 ballistic missile and the Iskander-M semi-ballistic missile — that run afoul of the proscribed range limits.

The Obama administration has suspected for years that Vladimir Putin was violating the INF Treaty, which supporters hail as the triumph of arms control. The Russians were boasting of their new missile capabilities in open-source liter-

ature as far back as 2007. Yet as defense analysts Keith Payne and Mark Schneider noted in these pages in February, “since 2009, the current administration’s unclassified arms-control compliance reports to Congress have been mum on the Russian INF Treaty noncompliance.”

Congress should at least call on Rose Gottemoeller, confirmed last month as under secretary of state for arms control over strenuous objections from Florida Senator Marco Rubio, to explain what the administration knew, and what it disclosed, about Moscow’s INF violations when she negotiated New Start.

Ms. Gottemoeller has been publicly noncommittal on this point, perhaps because she knew New Start would never have won a two-thirds Senate majority if Russia’s INF cheating had been widely known. The episode reminds us of why people like former Arizona Senator Jon Kyl were tried to oppose the ratification of New Start.

Which brings us to the administration’s announcement on cutting U.S. nuclear forces to levels specified by New Start four years before the treaty’s 2018 compliance deadline.

Obama has dismissed Russia as a regional power, but he is maneuvering the U.S. closer to a position of absolute nuclear inferiority to Russia.

To the surprise of defense analysts, the Pentagon will make the sharpest cuts in the submarine and bomber legs of the nuclear triad, while mostly preserving the silo-based Minuteman ICBMs. This means that the U.S. will maintain a stationary, and vulnerable,

nuclear force on the ground while largely dismantling what remains of our second-strike capability at sea and in the air. A crucial part of deterrence is convincing an adversary that you can survive a first strike.

It does not help U.S. security to dismantle the most survivable part of the U.S. arsenal. It’s fashionable in the West to dismiss this as “Cold War thinking,” but it appears that Vladimir Putin hasn’t given up on such thinking or he wouldn’t be investing in new nuclear delivery systems.

Cold War or no, recent events are providing daily reminders that the great-power rivalries of previous centuries are far from over. They have also offered the grim lesson that nations that forsake their nuclear deterrent, as Ukraine did, do so at considerable peril. After the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 the Senate refused to ratify Jimmy Carter’s SALT II Treaty.

Any serious response to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine should include a formal and public U.S. demarche about Russian cheating on the INF treaty, while promising to withdraw from New Start if the cheating continues.

Nuclear arsenals aside, the timing of Obama’s nuclear dismantling couldn’t be worse as Putin contemplates his next moves in Ukraine and sizes up a possible Western response.

Someone said recently that Putin plays chess while Obama plays checkers, but that’s unfair to the noble game of checkers.

The Wall Street Journal (April 9)

Threats to the world order

HUGH CORTAZZI



London

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s armed takeover of the Crimea and Russian military maneuvers on the eastern frontier of Ukraine have reminded many Western observers of the German takeover of Austria in 1936 and of German behavior in 1938 over the Sudeten Germans in what is now the Czech Republic. The Western response has been condemned by some as feeble and tantamount to the “appeasement” that foreshadowed World War II.

Putin has shown himself to be a ruthless autocrat. He wants to reassert Russian power and form a federation similar to the Soviet Union. He is intolerant of opposition and pursues those who criticise him, but he is not a clone of either Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin, and the situation does not yet amount to a revival of the Cold War. It lacks the ideological element and the communist ethos that ensnared ideological traitors.

There is no justification for complacency. If the West does not respond with determination, President Putin may think that he can proceed not only against eastern Ukraine but also against other targets such as Moldova or even the Baltic states where there are significant Russian-speaking populations.

There is a deep reluctance in Western Europe and North America to engage in further military operations outside Western Europe. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the casualties, military and civilian that they caused, have led to widespread popular distrust of the use of force to settle disputes.

The failure to intervene in Syria’s civil war, despite the use of chemical weapons, the horrendous casualties and two million refugees, reflected the changed public mood. The United States and Western Europe are only now emerging from the recession caused by the finan-

cial crisis. Governments and public opinion are focusing on the recovery and on improving living standards.

The feeble sanctions so far agreed by Group of Seven countries to deter President Putin and his regime from taking further action in Europe have to be seen against this background. But Russian saber-rattling and threats by President Putin, especially if followed by acts of provocation, could force a change in the public mood and engender a tougher response from governments.

President Putin is just as liable to miscalculate as Hitler did in 1939 and Japanese leaders did in December 1941.

We need to be ready to sacrifice some of our national interests for the higher cause of preserving peace and the world order. Russian money has brought many profitable deals to the City of London and City firms have been lobbying hard to protect their interests when sanctions against Russian firms and individuals are discussed internationally, but the City, especially the banks and hedge funds, are unpopular and do not have public opinion on their side.

Military action has so far been ruled out. There is no support for mobilizing NATO forces and sending combat units to assist Ukraine in dealing with possible Russian incursions or infiltration. But if Russia were to threaten a NATO member state such as one or more of the Baltic states, which were incorporated in the Soviet Union by Stalin, NATO would have to respond militarily. If it did not, that would be the end of NATO and of peace and order in Europe.

NATO countries have been reducing defense expenditures and taking what has been termed “a peace dividend.” This means that it is increasingly difficult to bring together meaningful and effective military forces to combat possible Russian aggression.

But while “boots on the ground” are still going to be needed in any future conflict, NATO countries have a large armory of sophisticated weapons that can be deployed, not least in the air.

As part of NATO’s response to President Putin’s threats, aircraft from other

NATO countries have been publicly deployed to the Baltic states and air patrols stepped up. The development and use of drones by U.S. forces in places such as Afghanistan and the Yemen is well known. They too could be deployed in Europe if necessary.

The U.S. in particular is known to have effective cyber warfare experts.

No doubt the Russians have developed counter measures to deal with drones and cyber attacks, but while it would be unwise to underestimate Russian scientists and technology, the edge remains with the West.

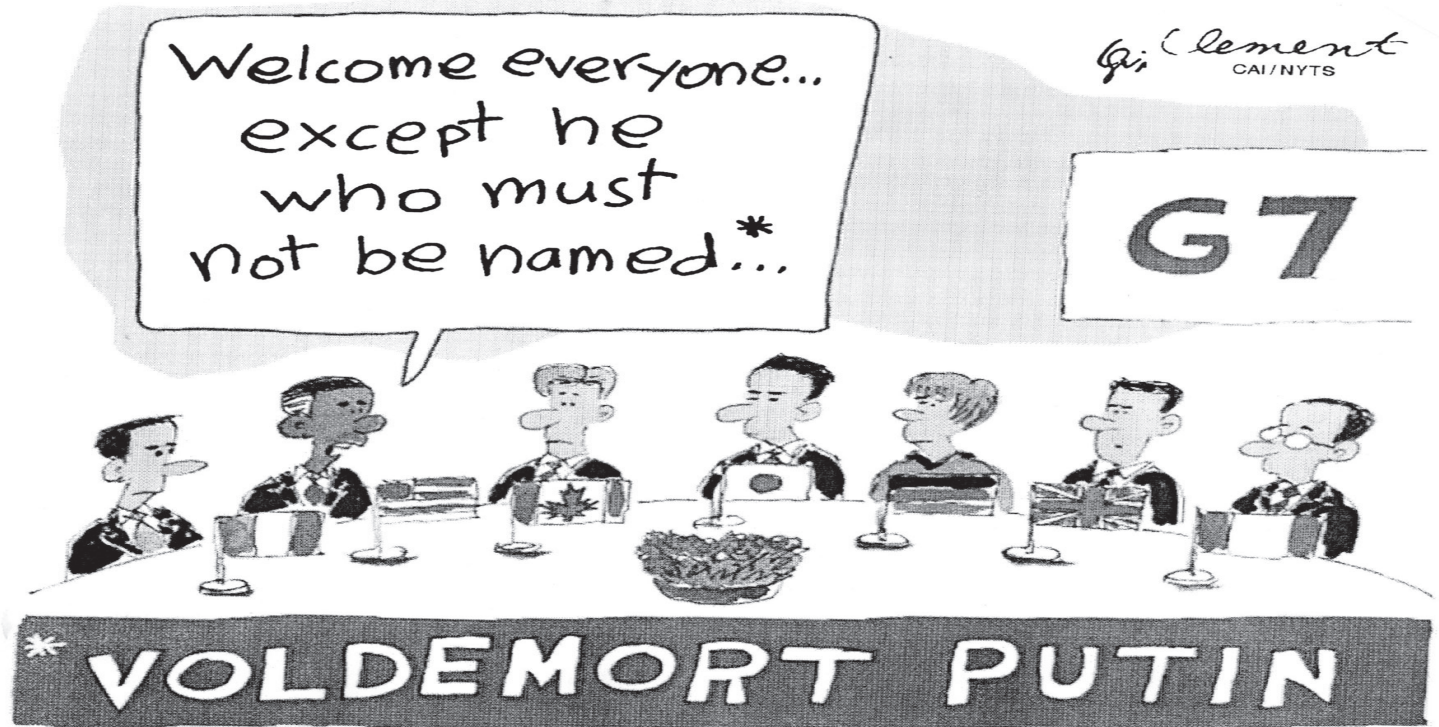
The military has often been criticized for preparing to fight the last war over again and for failing to adapt their strategy and tactics to meet new types of threats. There may now be a danger that politicians, involved in defense planning and the allocation of the limited resources available for defense, focus too much on new technology and neglect the need for adequate ground forces.

Some British generals have publicly deplored the British government’s plans to reduce the size of the standing British army and replace some of the regiments being made redundant by reservists.

President Putin’s threatening behavior should lead to a thorough review not only of European reliance on supplies of Russian gas but also of NATO’s readiness to meet Russian threats. NATO countries individually should look again at their defense budgets and the strength and abilities of their forces. Even more effort needs to be put into joint defense exercises and effective joint staff operations.

It isn’t easy to run any kind of joint operations, even when only two nationalities such as the U.S. and the U.K. are involved and have long experience of working together. A NATO joint operation involves many countries, languages, ways of thought and practices. We all want peace and stability, but this will not be achieved by appeasement.

Hugh Cortazzi served as Britain’s ambassador to Japan from 1980-1984.



Russia conducts a push-back against the U.S.

Martin Sieff
Washington
THE GLOBALIST

Russia’s rapid takeover and absorption of the Crimea is, in Malcolm Gladwell’s terms, a truly historic “Tipping Point” for the post-Cold War world. For the first time in more than a quarter century — since the Soviet Red Army’s evacuation of Afghanistan in 1987 — a long tide of Russian retreat, shrinkage and national disintegration has been reversed.

It appears very likely that Russian President Vladimir Putin, emboldened by the success of this move, will not stop there. He nurses major historical frustrations that are widely shared among the Russian people.

Eastern Ukraine is up to 90 percent Russian-speaking and, in the last Ukrainian presidential election in February 2010, voted overwhelmingly for ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. Russia is bound to encourage secessionist forces against Kiev throughout the eastern Ukraine.

For all the talk about Ukrainian unity, one cannot forget this inconvenient little fact: Eastern Ukraine may account for just under one-third of the entire country’s population territory, but it was fully integrated into Russia economically, politically and socially for 200 years before the Russian Revolution.

Crimea is a separate case. It was transferred within the Soviet Union from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian SSR by national leader Nikita Khrushchev. He was born in Russia in an area close to what became the Ukrainian border — and had close ties to both lands.

In 1991, Crimea voted to join Ukraine rather than Russia by 54 percent to 46

percent. Even so, the Russian-speaking population in Crimea has remained around 60 percent of the population since then. Given these historic ties, it is very difficult for the eastern Ukrainian region and population to sever its ties either to Moscow or to Kiev.

Russia may also encourage strong secessionist forces in northern Kazakhstan. The ethnic Russian majority there feels that its privileges and socio-economic position have been systematically hollowed out since independence in December 1991.

Underlying the ferociously strong sense of grievance that prevails among the Russian people against the West is one simple, overpowering emotion: “We’re mad as hell and we’re not going to take it anymore” (to use the classic line from Howard Beale, the Mad Prophet of the Airwaves from the classic 1976 movie “Network”).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has not just seen its historic standing and interests in its ancient zone of influence, going back hundreds of years, shrink; worse, Russia’s reach has been systematically dismantled by the United States. One solemn promise after another, made to the Russians, has been forgotten, ignored or scrapped.

It is one thing to talk about other nations’ freedom and independence (and rejoice when they receive it). It is quite another matter if those powers then move deliberately to put those freed countries fully into their orbit.

In that vein, U.S. policymakers and pundits also neglect to mention another inconvenient fact: Then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to the reunification of Germany in 1990-91 — and to a united Germany remaining within the U.S.-led NATO alliance — in

return for an unqualified commitment from U.S. President George H.W. Bush. That commitment was that the U.S. and NATO would never try to take a former Soviet satellite nation of Central Europe into NATO.

The first Bush honored that pledge. But his successor, President Bill Clinton, along with his second secretary of state, the Czech-born Madeleine Albright, did not. In 1997-98, they energetically promoted the integration of every former Warsaw Pact member nation into NATO.

From the Russian view, even worse was to come. President George W. Bush, in his Warsaw speech of June 15, 2001, pledged to integrate the three tiny Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia into the NATO alliance. This was done, even though all three nations had for almost half a century all been component republics within the Soviet Union.

When viewed from the Russian perspective, the toppling of Yanukovich was thus not an isolated incident. To them, it was just the latest and most outrageous step in a systematic U.S.-led policy of incursions into the heart of Russia’s historic core security zone.

Russia remains the pre-eminent military power on the Eurasian landmass (what Sir Halford Mackinder called the Heartland that decides the destiny of the world). It is also the most heavily armed thermo-nuclear power on the planet.

For these reasons alone, recent developments are fraught with danger far beyond the environs of Russia and Ukraine.

Martin Sieff is chief global analyst at The Globalist Research Center and editor-at-large for The Globalist.
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