

U.S. should stay in nuclear treaty

Editorial

The United States has said that it wants to withdraw from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) because of alleged violations by Russia. Moscow denies the charges and says the move is consistent with U.S. plans to loosen all international constraints on its behavior. Russia is likely cheating on the INF, but that is no reason to abandon the treaty yet. It has served European security well and abandoning the agreement would do more harm to arms control efforts generally, a development that could have profound implications for Asian security too.

The INF treaty was agreed in 1987 between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. It bans all nuclear-armed missiles in Europe with ranges from 500 to 5,500 km. It eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons and effectively capped a nuclear arms race that threatened Europe. At their summit last summer, NATO defense ministers confirmed that the INF treaty “has been crucial to Euro-Atlantic security.”

Four years ago, Washington accused Moscow of violating the treaty by testing a ground-launched cruise missile, the 9M729, that exceeded INF limits. Three years later, the U.S. said that Russia had “secretly deployed” one operational unit of the weapon, called the SSC-8. Moscow called the charges “totally unfounded” and countered that U.S. plans to deploy antimissile systems in Europe make it the real violator of the treaty. The U.S. denies that allegation.

The U.S. has pressed Moscow to discuss the charges. The Special Verification Commission, established by the INF treaty to address violations, held two meetings but they made no progress. In January, the Trump administration warned that it would be “taking new diplomatic, military, and economic measures ... to induce the Russian Federation to return to compliance.” It also said it would begin research on “concepts and options for conventional, ground-launched, intermediate-range missile systems” that are not prohibited by the treaty.

Last week, the U.S. apparently decided that it had had enough. National Security Advisor John Bolton, who has long opposed the treaty said that he would inform Russia of the decision to withdraw during meetings in Moscow this week. Bolton argues that the treaty puts the U.S. in an “excessively weak position” against Russia “and more importantly China.” U.S. President Donald Trump confirmed the reports, saying, “We’re going to terminate the agreement and we’re going to pull out.”

It will take six months to do so, and much can happen during that time if Moscow cares about the fate of the agreement. U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, while admitting that he is concerned about Russian violations, has backed the reintroduction of submarine-launched cruise missiles to U.S. naval vessels in response — but primarily as incentive for the Russians to return to negotiations and treaty compliance.

Even Moscow’s compliance may not be enough. While U.S. officials worry about the Russian threat, they also criticize the INF because it does not restrain China’s growing arsenal of short- and intermediate-range missiles. By one estimate, 90 percent of China’s missiles violate the terms of the INF treaty and this, U.S. strategic planners argue, puts the U.S. at a disadvantage in a regional conflict. In his statement, Trump said that he wants Russia and China “to come to us” and say they will not develop these weapons.

This argument is both ironic and disingenuous. Ironic, because it was thought that Russia was concerned by Chinese capabilities; disingenuous because the U.S. can use sea- or air-based systems against China, as can its allies, if they choose to develop strike systems.

The greatest concern is that this is more evidence of U.S. attempts to systematically dissemble constraints on its behavior. Bolton and others who think like him in the Trump administration are also opposed to the New START treaty on strategic nuclear weapons. It was negotiated in 2010 and expires in 2021; it can be extended for five years if both governments agree. There are few things more terrifying than the prospect of a world characterized by great power competition that has no treaties constraining the nuclear weapons competition.

Japan was rightly concerned at the time of its negotiation that the INF agreement would allow Russia to withdraw weapons from Europe and redeploy them to Asia. Russia has largely chosen not to do so but if the INF is abandoned, Moscow would have no incentive to restrain deployments in Europe and Asia. Japan should be even more concerned about discrediting arms control as a whole. China has long insisted that it will only engage in strategic arms talks when the U.S. and Russia bring their force levels down to Chinese levels — that was always a distant prospect, but it will recede even further into the future if New START is torn up as well. Treaties must be honored, of course, but there is a long way to go before the U.S. gives up on the INF.

A third gulf war? Unlikely but ...

Kuni Miyake



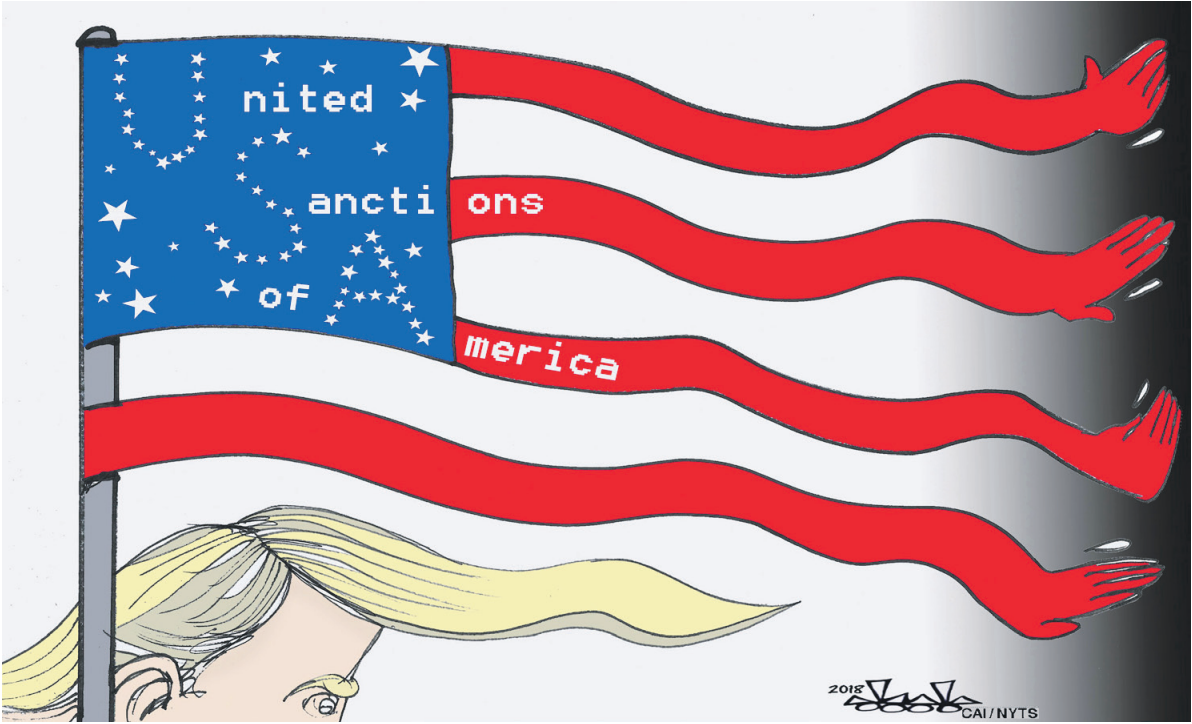
Are the United States and Iran headed for a direct military confrontation? The Canon Institute for Global Studies (CIGS), a Tokyo-based independent think tank where I direct its foreign policy/national security shop, conducted a 24-hour policy simulation (or so-called war game) last weekend over a contingency in the gulf region.

Some 40 participants — incumbent government officials, regional experts, scholars of international studies, businesspersons and journalists — gathered Saturday morning and each played his/her role as officials or reporters of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the U.S., Russia, China and Japan. I am profoundly grateful to their intellectual contribution to the war game in which they performed so realistically that the outcome of the simulation became something worth examining. Although CIGS will eventually publish a more detailed report on this event, here I wish to share with readers my take on the game.

Before that, I must confess something. I, probably for the last time, played the role of a simulation controller. A controller must not only organize and supervise the game process but also draft and finalize a scenario and produce imaginary news video clips, which we call “MHK News,” to show the participants during the 24-hour simulation.

I never liked this job, because our war game scenarios have been often denied or even surpassed by the developments in the real world. This time, unfortunately, was no exception.

On the very morning we started the game, the government of Saudi Arabia finally issued a statement that Jamal Khashoggi had died accidentally. Thanks to them, two participants, incumbent bureaucrats who were supposed to be my simulation co-controllers, could not come to the game. No use crying over spilled milk, I sighed. The following are the highlights of the event, which took place during CIGS’s 29th policy simulation since its foundation in 2009.



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First, the Saudi team was requested to finalize a report on the death of Khashoggi, in which the crown prince stated that, expressing deep condolences, he regretted the incident and arrested 30 more officials. The U.S. team was silent probably because the situation deteriorated in the Middle East.

Iran’s top-secret plan to enrich uranium was revealed while a Saudi fighter jet was downed in Yemen. Then Iran deployed mid-range ballistic missiles in southern Iraq and a group of Saudi Shiite dissidents took over an oil refinery in Saudi Arabia’s eastern province, taking many non-Saudi hostages including Chinese and Japanese citizens.

An Islamic revolution took place in a small gulf kingdom and so did unidentified drone attacks against the Saudi Royal household in Riyadh. Finally, a reckless frontline unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps advanced and captured an Israeli unit in the Golan Heights while the Iranian Navy attacked U.S. vessels on the Gulf waters.

After issuing ultimatums, Washington declared that the U.S. forces attacked and destroyed Iranian military facilities in the

coastal area, while Israel stated that they attacked Iranian bases between Golan and Damascus. Oh, I know pundits may say, “That is almost unconceivable and will never happen.”

I agree, and they may be right, simply because Iran and the U.S./Israel have been under a delicate but effective deterrence and, therefore, a direct serious military confrontation may not easily take place. Having said that, I learned a lot from last week’s policy simulation and the following are my seven points for connotations.

1. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia are inseparable. Despite the current difficulties, the U.S. cannot discard Saudi Arabia. In the simulation game, the Saudi team succeeded in surviving the scandal by taking advantage of contingencies in the Middle East. However, nobody knows if they can do the same in the real world of the 21st century.

2. A coup/revolution is difficult to intervene with. In the war game, there was a coup/Islamic revolution in a small kingdom. The dissidents claimed that they will introduce democracy to their land while allowing the presence of U.S. forces there. I also

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The real meaning of smoothing over Jamal Kashoggi’s death

The Kashoggi affair bares the flawed policies of the world’s powers

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Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s gruesome murder raises fundamental questions that go far beyond Middle Eastern geopolitics. They go to the risks of support for autocratic regimes by democratic and authoritarian world powers, the rise of illiberal democracy in the West, increasing authoritarianism in Russia, and absolute power in China in which checks and balances are weakened or non-existent.

Khashoggi’s killing is but the latest incident of hubris that stems from the abandonment of notions of civility, tolerance and plurality; and the ability of leaders to get away with murder, literally and figuratively. It also is the product of political systems with no provisions to ensure that the power of men like Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is restrained and checked.

Khashoggi was an advocate of the necessary checks and balances. In his last column published in The Washington Post posthumously, Khashoggi argued that:

“The Arab world needs a modern version of the old transnational media so citizens can be informed about global events. More important, we need to provide a platform for Arab voices. We suffer from poverty, mismanagement and poor education. Through the creation of an independent international forum, isolated from the influence of nationalist governments spreading hate through propaganda, ordinary people in the Arab world would be able to address the structural problems their societies face.”

Khashoggi’s words were echoed by prominent journalist and political analyst Rami Khouri. “We are heading to the law of the jungle if big power and Mideast state autocracy is not held accountable,” Khouri said.

In a similar vein, a survey by the Arab Barometer survey concluded that public institutions in the Arab world, including the judiciary, enjoyed little, if any, public trust.

According to a report by the Carnegie for Endowment of Peace:

“Part of the lack of trust comes from the disenfranchisement felt by many, especially youth and women.... The lack of alternative political forces is adding to the fatigue and lack of trust in institutions. Citizens in the region struggle to find an alternative to the ruling elite that might help address the issues of ineffective governance and corruption.”

The report went on to say that:

“Citizens are increasingly turning toward informal mechanisms such as protests and boycotts, and focusing more on specific issues of governance, such as service provision, particularly at the local level. Furthermore, with democracy under threat across the globe, calls for broad democratic reform have been replaced by more basic demands.”

What puts the price Khashoggi paid for advocating controls of absolute power in a class of its own is the brutality of his killing.

It is the fact that he was murdered in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul rather than, for example, by an unknown killer on a motorbike, and the increasingly difficult effort to resolve politically the crisis his death sparked.

Beyond the support by world powers of often brutal autocrats facilitated by a lack of checks and balances that in the past three decades has destroyed countries and costs the lives of millions, Khashoggi’s murder is also the product of the failure of Western leaders to seriously address the breakdown in confidence in leadership and political systems at home and abroad.

The breakdown peaked with the 2011 popular Arab revolts, simultaneous widespread protests in Latin America, the United States and Europe, and the increased popularity of anti-system — nationalist and populist politicians on both the right and the left.

Khashoggi joins the victims of extrajudicial poisoning in Britain by Russian operatives of people who like him may have been a thorn in the side of their leaders but did not pose an existential threat — not that that would justify murder or attempted murder.

He also joins the millions of casualties of failed policy and hubris caused by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein’s gassing of Kurds



in the 1980s and reckless 1990 invasion of Kuwait, support for Syrian President Bashar Assad’s determination to cling to power irrespective of the human cost, the Saudi-UAE-led war in Yemen that has produced the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II and China’s attempt to brainwash and socially engineer what the country’s leaders see as the model Chinese citizen. And those are just some of the most egregious instances.

No better are the multiple ways in which autocratic leaders try to ensure conformity not only through repression and suppression of a free press but also, for example, by deciding who deserves citizenship based upon whether they like their political, economic or social views rather than on birth right.

Take Bahrain, whose minority Sunni Muslim regime has stripped hundreds of its nationals of their citizenship simply because it did not like their views or Turkey with its mass arrests of anyone critical of the government.

The irony is that if elections in democracies are producing illiberal leaders like U.S. President Donald Trump, Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hungary’s Victor Orban, in Asia and Africa they are bringing forth governments mandated to reverse Chinese funding of “Belt and Road” projects that primarily benefit China rather than the recipient economically and pave the way for greater Chinese influencing of domestic

played the role of a dissident in the game and learned that it is not always easy for the U.S. forces to interfere with domestic politics there, especially when it is a democratic change of government.

3. A blockade of the Strait of Hormuz is not an option. Although the IRGC commander threatened the Arab Gulf states and the international community with a possible blockade of the strait, the Iran team never even thought about the blockade. This is because such a closure of the strait would only lead to a U.S. Navy blockade of Iran, halting the oil and gas tankers bound for and coming from Iranian ports. Iran knows such a move would be only suicidal.

4. A U.S. president running wild is unstoppable. The participant who played the role of President Donald Trump on the U.S. team lamented that it was not easy for the advisers of his administration to pursue U.S. national interests. He also recalled that it was extremely difficult for them to stop the president and correct his mistakes once military actions are taken.

5. Israel does whatever possible to survive. A small nation like Israel undoubtedly has the right to invent, practice and implement all conceivable and unconceivable ideas and tricks to survive the turmoil in the Middle East.

6. Russia and China aim to divert U.S. attentions. The two major powers do not and cannot seek hegemony in the Middle East and especially in the Gulf region. What they wish is for Beijing to make the U.S. involved in and preoccupied with the Middle East and to divert U.S. attentions from China. Likewise, Moscow, at least in this game, had a similar objective.

7. Japan is still out of the loop. In every past policy simulation featuring the Middle East, Japan has been always “out of the loop,” heavily focused on domestic political battles. To those who would criticize the Japanese government for “being out of the loop” in the next Mideast crisis, you are kindly advised to speak out for amending the existing national security laws.

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