

Postscript to a Solution to the Ukrainian Crisis

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Several recipients of my analysis of and policy recommendations on the Ukrainian crisis have hit on a serious point -- my suggestion that in the course of the process aimed at ending the crisis the Ukraine should be considered for membership in the European Union. A few people have doubted that Russia would be prepared to allow it. Their attitude is necessarily at this point uncertain or unknown. Since everyone agrees that the crisis is very serious and I believe this may be a crucial piece of any solution, let me explain my suggestion:

1) To succeed in the major objectives, which I believe are to (a) prevent a slide back into the Cold War, b) prevent further actual and potential clashes between Russia and the West and between Russia and the Ukraine and (c) help in the limited way we can to make the Ukraine into a viable and reasonably healthy and secure nation-state, we need to put together a package;

2) That package cannot be seen by any party -- the leaders of the governments of the US, the EU, NATO, Russia or the Ukraine -- as a humiliation; so there must be something in a successful negotiation and outcome for everyone. As we all know from our daily experiences at our individual level, lopsided deals don't work or last very long;

3) I believe that the Russians will demand, and are right to do so, that the Ukraine forswear joining NATO and that we -- the EU and the US -- affirm clearly and unequivocally that commitment and our obligation not to encourage it;

4) I believe that the leaders of the Ukraine, the US and probably of the member states of the EU will seek and feel they will need for their own domestic political purposes some sort of at least cosmetic reward for their commitment on the NATO abstention;

5) for the Ukraine to be reasonably secure and reasonably progressive and (hopefully) less corrupt and politically unattractive in the future, two things are going to be required: on the one hand, an infusion of money and opening of trade and, on the other hand, both a role model to which it can relate and a friendly critic. Of course, it must do the job itself or the job will not be done. We outsiders cannot do it for the Ukraine. And the job will be difficult. The Ukraine has a weak, corrupt and tyrannical government. The US is, apparently, willing (not for the sake of the Ukraine but for domestic politics) to supply or arrange most of the needed money but, again on the one hand, its record in "nation building" is appalling and nearly uniformly unsuccessful and, on the other hand, direct American intervention in the Ukraine would certainly be opposed by Russia. Ergo, the only feasible agency to advance these goals is the European Union;

6) Is the EU or are its member states capable? Few outside observers think it is; many insiders agree. But, there are precedents that argue for optimism although they are now half a century out of date (e.g. the work of Hans Schuman, Paul Spaak and Jean Monnet that led to the 1957 Treaty of Rome and the formation of the European Economic Community.) Some of their work was carried on by informal groups like the Table Ronde, but statesmen of their stature were and are hard to find and public interest groups like the Table Ronde do not seem to have taken up this issue. However, I believe, that when faced with the challenge, Europeans will rise to the occasion when given the opportunity. As in Napoleon's army, every soldier carried in his pack a marshal's baton. Batons will be available if the "soldiers" will carry them. If they do not, we must seek other actors, but they too will be hard to find at least in the near term;

7) Will the Russian government allow or accept such moves (the Ukraine joining the EU and the EU performing a sort of mini-Marshall Plan venture in the Ukraine)? I am sure

that the immediate answer will be "no." But I also believe that the answer can become "yes" under appropriate circumstances. What are they? The short answer is negotiation. As I pointed out in my paper on the Ukrainian crisis, I have helped to negotiate two such crises, both of which were far more emotional and far more complex than the current impasse. So my experience tells me that whatever the initial reactions, there are ways to work toward a consensus. The key elements on the Russian side are a) the end of sanctions, b) probably help in alleviating its currency and fiscal problems, c) the end of the NATO threat and (d) agreement that the Crimea will remain Russian in some cosmetically acceptable form. Additionally, it would be beneficial to them and certainly to the EU and the US if we could stand down the nuclear weapons on their frontiers and in eastern Europe from at least their "hair trigger" status or, better yet, remove them. Thus, we have in our hands the "tools" with which to work out a deal that could meet the Russian demands in return for their meeting ours;

8) What do we really want and, more crucially, what do we really need? Those two need to be distinguished. What many Westerners, particularly the American neocons and those who are in the arms business and/or others who for various reasons hate the Russians want is to humiliate President Putin and thus, necessarily at the present time, the Russians. This is a foolish, self-defeating and very dangerous objective. What we really need is actually very little. If we are sensible, hard-headed and hopefully wise, we should try to a) stop and reverse the descent into another Cold war, b) halt further spread or upgrading of nuclear weapons and delivery systems and (c) return to peaceful competition in place of military and espionage confrontation. Such confrontation could lead us again to the brink of an almost unimaginable war as I wrote in my essay on the crisis. If we are wise, we will act in such ways as will make it less likely;

9) Is the US capable of wise actions? I confess that I have my doubts. It is so appealing in domestic politics to "stand tall" and take a loud "patriotic" stance. It pays off for politicians (to get elected), military officers (who get promoted) and arms manufacturers (who get rich). Both American political parties wallow in war rhetoric because they think, and unfortunately I fear that they are right, the public loves it. We are rich in arm chair generals and television soldiers. It will take acts of statesmanship to avoid giving sway to the fun of Russia-bashing. I look around and find few statesmen. My dear friend Senator George McGovern was one of the last, and he was roundly defeated in his campaign for the presidency and is now dead. So, I suspect and fear we are unlikely find statesmen able and willing to think and plan better ways;

10) If we do not, what will happen? Having been intimately involved in the only serious confrontation with nuclear weapons in hand, I know how hard it is to keep one's sanity. During the tense days of the Cuban Missile Crisis, we were all exhausted. I presume the Russians were too. (At least later when I met with my counterparts in Moscow, that is what they said.) Many on both sides were all for having a go at one another. Then, at least some of even the hawks knew how easy is to move or stumble from conventional conflict to nuclear war either by design or by mistake. Or from simple exhaustion. Fortunately, President Kennedy had his hand on the break. Robert Kennedy, whom I had known in college and did not like, played an essential supporting role. Robert McNamara took the role of the technician, without any clear position, but ready to supply the means for a nuclear war if that were decided upon. The rest of us (we were not many) played lesser roles. During that week, I dealt with a number of senior commanders of our armed forces; they showed, in my conversations with them, surprisingly little knowledge or even information on what was likely to be involved if we pushed the Soviet leaders too hard. In fact, astonishing as it now seems, few even understood what the main strategic issues were. This was certainly true of, for example, the senior American naval commander, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral

Anderson. Inadvertently, he almost allowed an incident to occur that, almost unnoticed at the time, might have tipped the scale to war. Absent Kennedy and absent Khrushchev, both of whom reined in their hawks and kept themselves open to the compromise that literally saved the world, we might have lost everything. We don't have such men around today. Or at least I have not identified them. So, we are in a very fragile position and all of us need to lend our support to a wise, possible and peaceful policy.

If we do not, God help us.

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