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Article I.

Newsweek

Israel Won't Stop Spying on the U.S.

Jeff Stein

May 6, 2014 -- Whatever happened to honor among thieves? When the National Security Agency was caught eavesdropping on German Chancellor Angela Merkel's cell phone, it was considered a rude way to treat a friend. Now U.S. intelligence officials are saying—albeit very quietly, behind closed doors on Capitol Hill—that our Israeli “friends” have gone too far with their spying operations here.

According to classified briefings on legislation that would lower visa restrictions on Israeli citizens, Jerusalem's efforts to steal U.S. secrets under the cover of trade missions and joint defense technology contracts have “crossed red lines.”

Israel's espionage activities in America are unrivaled and unseemly, counterspies have told members of the House Judiciary and Foreign Affairs committees, going far beyond activities by other close allies, such as Germany, France, the

U.K. and Japan. A congressional staffer familiar with a briefing last January called the testimony “very sobering...alarming...even terrifying.” Another staffer called it “damaging.”

The Jewish state’s primary target: America’s industrial and technical secrets.

“No other country close to the United States continues to cross the line on espionage like the Israelis do,” said a former congressional staffer who attended another classified briefing in late 2013, one of several in recent months given by officials from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the State Department, the FBI and the National Counterintelligence Directorate.

The intelligence agencies didn’t go into specifics, the former aide said, but cited “industrial espionage—folks coming over here on trade missions or with Israeli companies working in collaboration with American companies, [or] intelligence operatives being run directly by the government, which I assume meant out of the [Israeli] Embassy.”

An Israeli Embassy spokesman declined to comment on the allegations, which have surfaced repeatedly over the years. Likewise, representatives of two U.S. intelligence agencies, while acknowledging problems with Israeli spies, would not discuss classified testimony for the record. The FBI would neither confirm nor deny it briefed Congress. A State Department representative would say only that staff in its Consular and Israel Palestinian Affairs offices briefed members of Congress on visa reciprocity issues.

Of course, the U.S. spies on Israel, too. “It was the last place you wanted to go on vacation,” a former top CIA operative told Newsweek, because of heavy-handed Israeli surveillance. But the level of Israeli espionage here now has rankled U.S. counterspies.

“I don’t think anyone was surprised by these revelations,” the former aide said. “But when you step back and hear...that there are no other countries taking advantage of our security relationship the way the Israelis are for espionage purposes, it is quite shocking. I mean, it shouldn’t be lost on anyone that after all the hand-wringing over [Jonathan] Pollard, it’s still going on.”

Israel and pro-Israel groups in America have long lobbied U.S. administrations to free Pollard, a former U.S. naval intelligence analyst serving a life sentence since 1987 for stealing tens of thousands of secrets for Israel. (U.S. counterintelligence officials suspect that Israel traded some of the Cold War-era information to Moscow in exchange for the emigration of Russian Jews.) After denying for over a decade that Pollard was its paid agent, Israel apologized and promised not to spy on U.S. soil again. Since then, more Israeli spies have been arrested and convicted by U.S. courts.

I.C. Smith, a former top FBI counterintelligence specialist during the Pollard affair, tells Newsweek, “In the early 1980s, dealing with the Israelis was, for those assigned that area, extremely frustrating. The Israelis were supremely confident that they had the clout, especially on the Hill, to basically get [away] with just about anything. This was the time of the Criteria Country List—later changed to the National Security Threat

List—and I found it incredible that Taiwan and Vietnam, for instance, were on [it], when neither country had conducted activities that remotely approached the Pollard case, and neither had a history of, or a comparable capability to conduct, such activities.”

While all this was going on, Israel was lobbying hard to be put on the short list of countries (38 today) whose citizens don't need visas to visit here.

Until recently, the major sticking point was the Jewish state's discriminatory and sometimes harsh treatment of Arab-Americans and U.S. Palestinians seeking to enter Israel. It has also failed to meet other requirements for the program, such as promptly and regularly reporting lost and stolen passports, officials say—a problem all the more pressing since Iranians were found to have boarded the missing Malaysia Airlines flight with stolen passports.

“But this is the first time congressional aides have indicated that intelligence and national security concerns also are considerations in weighing Israel's admission into the visa waiver program,” Jonathan Broder, the foreign and defense editor for CQ Roll Call, a Capitol Hill news site, wrote last month. He quoted a senior House aide as saying, “The U.S. intelligence community is concerned that adding Israel to the visa waiver program would make it easier for Israeli spies to enter the country.”

The Israelis “thought they could just snap their fingers” and get friends in Congress to legislate visa changes, a Hill aide said, instead of going through the required hoops with DHS. But

facing resistance from U.S. intelligence, Israel recently signaled it's willing to work with DHS, both Israeli and U.S. officials say. "Israel is interested in entering into the visa waiver program and is taking concrete steps to meet its conditions," Israeli Embassy spokesman Aaron Sagui told Newsweek. "Most recently, the U.S. and Israel decided to establish a working group to advance the process," Sagui added, saying that "Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Zeev Elkin will head the Israeli delegation." He refused to say when the Elkin delegation was coming.

Congressional aides snorted at the announcement. "The Israelis haven't done s**t to get themselves into the visa waiver program," the former congressional aide said, echoing the views of two other House staffers working on the issue. "I mean, if the Israelis got themselves into this visa waiver program and if we were able to address this [intelligence community] concern—great, they're a close ally, there are strong economic and cultural links between the two countries, it would be wonderful if more Israelis could come over here without visas. I'm sure it would spur investment and tourist dollars in our economy and so on and so forth. But what I find really funny is they haven't done s**t to get into the program. They think that their friends in Congress can get them in, and that's not the case. Congress can lower one or two of the barriers, but they can't just legislate the Israelis in."

The path to visa waivers runs through DHS and can take years to navigate. For Chile, it was three years, a government official said on a not-for-attribution basis; for Taiwan, "several." Requirements include "enhanced law enforcement and security-related data sharing with the United States; timely reporting of

lost and stolen passports; and the maintenance of high counterterrorism, law enforcement, border control, aviation and document security standards,” a DHS statement said.

Israel is not even close to meeting those standards, a congressional aide said. “You’ve got to have machine-readable passports in place—the e-passports with a data chip in them. The Israelis have only just started to issue them to diplomats and senior officials and so forth, and that probably won’t be rolled out to the rest of their population for another 10 years.”

But U.S. counterspies will get the final word. And since Israel is as likely to stop spying here as it is to give up matzo for Passover, the visa barriers are likely to stay up.

As Paul Pillar, the CIA’s former national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia, told Newsweek, old habits are hard to break: Zionists were dispatching spies to America before there even was an Israel, to gather money and materials for the cause and later the fledgling state. Key components for Israel’s nuclear bombs were clandestinely obtained here. “They’ve found creative and inventive ways,” Pillar said, to get what they want.

“If we give them free rein to send people over here, how are we going to stop that?” the former congressional aide asked. “They’re incredibly aggressive. They’re aggressive in all aspects of their relationship with the United States. Why would their intelligence relationship with us be any different?”

Jeff Stein writes SpyTalk for Newsweek from Washington, D.C.

The National Interest

Why Israel Worries

Richard L. Russell

May 6, 2014 -- Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is momentarily breathing a sigh of relief now that he can blame Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas for scuttling the latest round of peace negotiations. Abbas' reconciliation pact with Hamas in Gaza allows Netanyahu to wash his hands of the peace process—because militant Hamas will not even acknowledge Israel's right to exist—to focus on more acute Israeli security worries.

The Israelis have been exasperated that the United States has wasted time, attention and diplomatic capital on this failed round of negotiations with the Palestinians. The Israelis see the Palestinian issue akin to a house in the neighborhood with electrical wiring that is not up to code. It needs to be fixed, least it risk causing a fire in the future. The Israelis, however, see other neighborhood houses ablaze in Syria and Iran. The Israelis want the United States to come running with a water hose, but, instead, they see the Obama administration coming with an electrician's toolbox. That exasperation was publicly revealed when Israeli defense minister Moshe Ya'alon undiplomatically called Secretary of State John Kerry "obsessive and messianic"

about the peace process and hoped that he “gets a Nobel Prize and leaves us alone.”

The Israelis think that the Americans too willingly accepts the Arab narrative that the “root cause” of all the problems in the Middle East lie in the failure of the Palestinians to have their own nation-state. The Israelis of all political stripes know all too well that even if they and the Palestinians were to some day live in separate nation-states enjoying neighborly bliss, most of the region’s troubles would remain. From the Israeli security standpoint, the conflict with the Palestinians is manageable, its costs tolerable, and its dangers longer term; the fallout violence from the Arab Spring and Iran’s nuclear weapons ambitions are here and now and should be high on the American security agenda.

American national-security officials and military commanders have their hands full these days, but few would want to trade places with their Israeli counterparts. Israel has impressively defended itself in numerous wars for several decades against unfavorable odds. Despite those military feats, the foundations of Israeli security have cracked and crumbled rapidly since 2011 and the onslaught of the so-called Arab Spring. Notwithstanding Israel’s military prowess, the country’s security is growing more precarious on a numerous fronts, and the Israelis are gravely concerned that the United States might prove to be a fair-weather friend in future contingencies.

A cornerstone of Israel’s security foundation has been the “cold peace” with Egypt since the 1979 peace treaty. Israel and Egypt, bolstered by American economic and security assistance, have mutually enjoyed a secure border along the Sinai Peninsula for

more than thirty years. The Arab spring, however, has jeopardized that security stability. The future course of the regime in Cairo is uncertain. The military regime for now seems content maintaining the peace treaty with Israel. But Jerusalem wonders how long the military regime will last and whether or not its redoubled political repression will eventually backfire to bring the Salafists and Muslim Brotherhood back into the streets en masse, and from there back into the halls of political power. Even if the Egyptian military regime hangs on, the situation along Egypt's border with Israel continues to deteriorate. Tribes and Al Qaeda-linked jihadists are growing in influence and operations in the Sinai and mixing with human trafficking from Africa into Israel.

The upshot is that Israeli security planners no longer have the luxury of assuming the border with Egypt is secure. They will have to devote more resources to maintaining security there than they had in the past even while Israel's security along the borders with Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan are growing more precarious.

The Israelis had secured their border with Syria during the 1967 war by capturing the Golan Heights. With that high ground the Israelis could comfortably gaze into Syria, and on a clear day they could even see Damascus. The Israelis were confident of their air superiority over the Syrian air force given the results of their air battles in 1982, in which Israel downed about eighty Syrian combat aircraft without losing even one of their own. Having bested Syrian ground forces in the 1967 and 1973 wars, they were also confident of their ground forces' superiority over

Syrian forces. And having watched, listened to, and studied the Syrian forces arrayed across the border for decades, the Israelis were confident that in the event of another war, they could yet again humble Syria's military.

Times have changed and now the Israelis peering from the Golan Heights into Syria see a land burning and in chaos. The Israelis worry that the collapse of Syrian forces from border areas is opening up power vacuums that will be increasingly filled by militant jihadists coming from around the world to oust the Syrian regime. The Israelis have to worry that should they accomplish this task, Islamic jihadists will use their Syrian foothold to mount cross-border operations against Israel, much as Hezbollah and its Iranian benefactors have done from Lebanon since the 1980s.

The Israelis are frustrated that their military withdraw from Lebanon in 2000 did not earn them a peace on that border. The Israelis punished Lebanon in the 2006 war after Hezbollah crossed a red line by kidnapping Israeli soldiers patrolling the border. Unlike the Obama administration, when the Israelis establish a red line, they actually make good on threats to use force least adversaries come to the conclusion that they are bluffing to erode overall deterrence. Hezbollah, however, has restored and improved its missile and rocket forces with greater inventories than it had during the 2006 war. Defense Minister Ya'alon says that Hezbollah now has around 100,000 missiles and rockets.

In the event of future Hezbollah cross border attacks, the Israelis will have to again militarily go back into Lebanon to "mow the grass," as they like to call military operations to temporarily cut

down Hezbollah military capabilities, leadership, and organization. The Israelis see “mowing the grass” as the price to be paid for a time of quiet until the next round of conflict. The Iranians, meanwhile, have been keen to work with Syria to build-up Hezbollah forces in Lebanon. The Iranians see Hezbollah as their “ace in the hole” to deter Israel from attacking Iran’s nuclear program. The Iranians could complement Hezbollah missiles and rockets from Lebanon with their own growing inventory of long-range Shahab-3 missiles. Both Hezbollah and Iran probably calculate that they could fire massive barrages of missiles and rockets to attrite and overwhelm Israel’s ballistic missile and rocket defenses.

The Israelis are aghast that the United States has for all intents and purposes abandoned the credible threat of military force against Iran’s nuclear program and is now exclusively devoting itself to a “diplomatic” solution to the issue. The Israelis think the Americans naïve to believe that the Iranians are genuinely negotiating. The Israelis bet that the Iranians are only using international negotiations as a means to slip out from under crushing international economic sanctions while preserving Iran’s now extensive, sophisticated and diversified nuclear program, one with the infrastructure needed to eventually give Tehran a robust arsenal of nuclear weapons.

The Israelis respect Iran’s diplomatic prowess that skillfully plays on the desperate desires on the Americans and Europeans to avoid military force. The Iranians aim to string the West along with a series of extensions of the so-called “six-month interim agreement” to buy months, if not years, for international

economic sanctions to collapse while preserving their prized nuclear program. If the Israelis take matters into their own hands—as they are apt to do when their vital security interests are at stake—and strike Iranian’s nuclear facilities, Tehran will use its own and Hezbollah’s missiles and unconventional-warfare methods to mount retaliatory attacks against Israel’s cities, interests and security partners.

With the loss of secure borders with Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, the Israelis fret that they could lose their last remaining secure border with Jordan. The Israelis have not had any better a constructive and pragmatic partner than the Jordanian monarchy stretching back decades from the time of quiet “under the table” cooperation to the 1994 signing of a peace treaty. The Jordanian monarchy so far has escaped the scope and depth of violence that erupted elsewhere in the Arab spring, but the political, economic, and societal pressures in Jordan are growing.

The Jordanians have long hosted Palestinian refugees, and more recently Iraqi refugees who fled Iraq’s post-2003 war violence, but they now have the added burden of the hosting of Syria refugees who have fled civil war. Jordan now hosts some 600,000 Syrians, which is about ten percent of Jordan’s population. The Israelis wonder how much more of these huge pressures the Jordanian monarchy can withstand before they collectively boil over into massive unrest and gravely threaten the stability of the monarchy. If the moderate, pragmatic, and skillful government in Amman were to fall, the successor regime could be composed of the Muslim Brotherhood. Worse, it could open up yet another state for Salafists to move in and take root. Both scenarios would give Israel another hostile neighbor.

The geopolitical environment in which Israel is fated to live is a cauldron of boiling chaos, but Israeli officials are not reassured that the United States will have their backs covered in coming regional crises. The Israelis see the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" as a mere cover story for abandoning them to the Middle East's tough security environment. Defense Minister Ya'alon even went as far as to publicly assess that President Obama's "image in the world is feebleness." The Israelis see the United States creating political-military security vacuums in the region that are beginning to be filled by major outside powers. Russia is doing this by doggedly defending the Syrian regime with adroit diplomacy and by forging new security ties with Egypt; China is doing so by upping its military cooperation with Saudi Arabia. In short, as the Israelis see regional tensions and violence multiplying and intensifying all around them, they see their American counterparts running for the door.

Richard L. Russell is the author of [Sharpening Strategic Intelligence: Why the CIA Gets It Wrong and What Needs to Be Done to Get It Right](#) (Cambridge University Press).

[Article 3.](#)

Project Syndicate

The Post-National Mirage

Shlomo Ben Ami

May 5, 2014 -- The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas once defined our times as “the age of post-national identity.” Try convincing Russian President Vladimir Putin of that.

Indeed, the great paradox of the current era of globalization is that the quest for homogeneity has been accompanied by a longing for ethnic and religious roots. What Albert Einstein considered a “malignant fantasy” remains a potent force even in united Europe, where regional nationalism and xenophobic nativism have not come close to disappearing.

In the Balkan wars of the 1990’s, communities that had shared the same landscapes for centuries, and individuals who grew up together and went to the same schools, fought one another ferociously. Identity, to use a Freudian expression, was reduced to the narcissism of minor differences.

Nationalism is essentially a modern political creation wrapped in the mantle of a common history and shared memories. But a nation has frequently been a group of people who lie collectively about their distant past, a past that is often – too often – rewritten to suit the needs of the present. If Samson was a Hebrew hero, his nemesis Delilah must have been a Palestinian.

Nor have ethnic loyalties always matched political boundaries. Even after the violent dismemberment of multiethnic Yugoslavia, none of the successor states can claim to be wholly homogeneous. Ethnic minorities in Slovenia and Serbia (even with the exclusion of Albanian Kosovo) account for between 20-30% of the total population.

Dictatorships, unlike democracies, are ill-equipped to accommodate ethnic and religious diversity. As we saw in Yugoslavia and are now seeing in the Arab Spring revolts, a multiethnic or multi-religious society and an authoritarian regime can be a recipe for state implosion. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, too, had much to do with the collapse of its multinational structure. Dozens of ethnic minorities live in China, where Muslim Uighurs, in particular, face official repression.

India is a case apart. The vastness of Indian nationality, with its plethora of cultures, ethnicities, and religions, has not immunized it against ethnic tensions, but it has made India more a seat for a major world civilization than a mere nation-state.

Conversely, ethnocentric nationalism is bound to distort a people's relations with the rest of the world. Zionism is a case in point. The enlightened ideology of a nation rising from the ashes of history has become a dark force in the hands of a new social and political elite that have perverted the idea. Zionism has lost its way as a defining paradigm for a nation willing to find a bridge with the surrounding Arab world.

The European Union, a political community built on democratic consensus, was not established in order to bring about the end of the nation-state; its purpose has been to turn nationalism into a benign force of transnational cooperation. More generally, democracies have shown that they can reconcile multiethnic and multilingual diversity with overall political unity. So long as particular groups are willing to abandon the politics of secession and embrace what Habermas calls "constitutional patriotism," political decision-making can be decentralized.

The recent electoral defeat of the secessionists in Quebec should serve as a lesson for separatists throughout Europe. Decades of constitutional uncertainty caused companies to leave Quebec in droves, which ruined Montreal as a corporate hub. Ultimately, the Québécois rebelled against the separatists' delusion that the state from which they wanted to secede would cheerfully serve their interests.

Likewise, the longstanding hemorrhage of talent and capital from Scotland might accelerate should nationalists succeed in persuading a majority of Scots to vote for secession this autumn. A similar risk can be found in Catalonia's bid for independence from Spain.

The central state always has its own nation-building responsibilities. Putin can manipulate Ukraine not because there is a shred of credibility to his claim that the Russian minority there faces persecution, but because Ukraine's corrupt democracy failed to build a truly self-sustaining nation.

Consider, by contrast, Italy's annexation of South Tyrol, a predominantly German-speaking region. The move was decided at the Versailles Peace Conference after World War I without consulting the population, which was 90% German-speaking. Yet today, South Tyrol enjoys extensive constitutional autonomy, including full cultural freedom and a fiscal regime that leaves 90% of tax revenues in the region. The bilingual, peaceful coexistence of the province's inhabitants can serve as a lesson to both rigid central governments and unrealistic secessionist movements elsewhere.

For example, an unofficial poll recently showed that 89% of

residents in Italy's northern "Repubblica Veneta" back independence. But, though the Venetians' desire to secede from the poorer South might sound familiar to other regions in Europe where taxpayers feel aggrieved at subsidizing other, allegedly feckless, regions, the politics of secession can be taken to absurd extremes.

Scotland could reach those extremes. The residents of Shetland, Orkney, and the Western Isles are already demanding the right to decide whether to remain part of an independent Scotland. One can easily imagine the government in Edinburgh opposing the new secessionists, just as Westminster opposes Scottish independence today.

When the historian Ernest Renan dreamed of a European Confederation that would supersede the nation-state, he could not yet envisage the challenge posed by micro-states and para-states. He believed that "man is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion, nor of the course of rivers nor of the direction taken by mountain chains." Maybe so. But we have yet to prove it.

Shlomo Ben-Ami, a former Israeli foreign minister and internal security minister, is Vice President of the Toledo International Center for Peace. He is the author of Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy.

Article 4.

The National (UAE)

Saudi Arabia's military exercise was a goodbye wave to America

Faisal Al Yafai

May 5, 2014 -- When one of the most powerful militaries in the Middle East holds the largest military exercise in its history, the region and allies would be wise to look beyond the explosions and manoeuvres at the political intent. Last week's "Abdullah Sword" military exercises in the north-east of Saudi Arabia brought together 130,000 troops, as well as military jets, helicopters and ships. With the notable exception of Qatar, all the GCC countries were there to observe the exercises, as well as the head of Pakistan's army.

On the surface, the exercises were timed to coincide with the ninth anniversary of the accession of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. But military movements of this order send messages. But to whom?

The obvious answer is Iran, Saudi's great regional rival, or one of the three states that the Saudis are most concerned about – Syria, Iraq or Yemen. And it will not have escaped Tehran's notice that the CSS-2 ballistic missiles that Riyadh paraded for the first time last week can easily reach any part of Iran.

Certainly, a message of strength was being telegraphed to the region. But there was also another one, over the heads of the region, to the United States: if you leave, the region can defend itself. It sometimes appears to be an overstatement to suggest that the United States – which maintains bases in several

regional countries – is planning to leave. But leaving does not necessarily entail a complete withdrawal. Under the Obama presidency, America has departed the Gulf in two ways; the first through disengagement, with the focus of the US president rarely on the detail of the problems of the region. And secondly through insufficient attention to the relationships that have long formed the diplomatic backbone of the region. By seeking a peace deal with Iran – Saudi Arabian critics would say at any price – the US has angered its traditional allies in the Gulf, who have invested time and effort in the alliance. In some respects, the disengagement has been a long time coming, but Mr Obama’s policy and personality have accelerated it. The curse of being a superpower is that policies ripple far beyond the initial problem. When Obama backed down from enforcing his “red lines” over Syria, both allies and enemies took note. If that was a one-off, the explanation that Syria was complex – and Iraq too recent – for the US to be effective could stand.

But there have been other developments elsewhere in the world, which, taken together, make the Gulf states wonder if the United States can still be counted on to react to any military provocation – and therefore, by extension, whether the US deterrent still exists.

In November, China established an air defence identification zone over parts of the East China Sea. In particular, the zone covered the Japanese-controlled Senkaku islands, which China also claims. Japan was incensed and, in response, the US sent two military planes through the zone. But the zone has remained in place and the US has gone quiet over it. Couple that with events in Ukraine, where, despite being a signatory to a post-Soviet treaty that guaranteed Ukraine’s territorial integrity in

return for the state giving up its nuclear weapons, the US did not act forcefully to stop Russia annexing Crimea. In each case, there have been different motivations and political considerations. But taken together, these events, and others, have contributed to an atmosphere of suspicion that, if push came to shove, the US would walk away. Under Mr Obama, the superpower does not appear to have much interest in defending the status quo. The post-Soviet settlement immensely benefits the US, but George W Bush undid much of that by fighting an illegal war in Iraq. Other states became less likely to heed international law.

Yet Mr Obama's reticence has undermined the global order just as surely as Mr Bush's unnecessary war in Iraq did. Not to the same extent, but, gradually, piece by piece, it is being undermined.

That is what Abdullah Sword was about, establishing a credible alternative deterrent. In time, the signals are that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf seeks something even larger, an alliance stretching from Egypt to Pakistan. The recent Saudi, UAE and Egyptian military exercises fit into this trajectory.

With both Iraq and Yemen fragile and bordering Saudi, the kingdom is nervous of what might be next. Similarly with Syria, where, with a second refugee camp being built in Jordan and with the Assad regime looking like exerting control again, that would leave hundreds of thousands of refugees permanently in Jordan, which is already vulnerable. That too represents a big risk for the kingdom.

Taken together, Saudi Arabia wants to establish itself publicly as

capable of withstanding any threat. The Arab Spring has pushed Saudi from its traditional comfort zone of operating behind the scenes into more of a leadership role for the region. By staging such a forceful display with Abdullah Sword, the kingdom is showing the region that it has the allies and the weapons to defend itself. Gradually, the Gulf is preparing for the day America's warships sail away.

Faisal al Yafai is a journalist and writer whose work appears in the Guardian, the National (UAE) and other publications.

Article 5.

The Washington Post

Obama tends to create his own foreign policy headaches

David Ignatius

May 7, 2014 -- It's painful watching the YouTube video of President Obama in Manila last week, talking about hitting singles and doubles in foreign policy. Everything he says is measured, and most of it is correct. But he acts as if he's talking to a rational world, as opposed to one inhabited by leaders such as Russia's Vladimir Putin.

In the realm of power politics, U.S. presidents get points not for being right but for being (or appearing) strong. Presidents either

say they're going to knock the ball out of the park, or they say nothing. The intangible factors of strength and credibility (so easy to mock) are, in fact, the glue of a rules-based international system.

Under Obama, the United States has suffered some real reputational damage. I say that as someone who sympathizes with many of Obama's foreign policy goals. This damage, unfortunately, has largely been self-inflicted by an administration that focuses too much on short-term messaging. At key turning points — in Egypt and Libya during the Arab Spring, in Syria, in Ukraine and, yes, in Benghazi — the administration was driven by messaging priorities rather than sound, interests-based policy.

That's why the Benghazi "talking points" fiasco still has legs. Not because of some goofy criminal conspiracy, as imagined by conservatives, but because it shows the administration spent more time thinking about what to say than what to do.

How can Obama repair the damage? One obvious answer is to be careful: The perception of weakness can goad a president into taking rash and counterproductive actions to show he's strong. The deeper you slide into a perceived reputational hole, the worse this dilemma.

One of Obama's strengths is that he does indeed understand the value of caution. He can be decisive, as in the May 2011 raid to kill Osama bin Laden. But he's usually reluctant to make large bets when the outcome is uncertain, which is commendable. The country should value a deliberative president who knows U.S. military options are limited in dealing with Putin in Ukraine, as opposed to a hothead who pretends otherwise.

You can sympathize with Obama in Manila, when he hectored those who advocate tougher policy: “What do you mean? . . . What else are you talking about?” Some of his critics’ proposals are half-baked or downright dangerous. But Obama is right only up to a point. Nearly two years ago his own advisers recommended covert support for the Syrian opposition; Obama should have said yes. His critics didn’t make him draw a “red line” on Syrian chemical weapons; that was self-inflicted. Obama didn’t need to delay so long to move more military assets to the Baltic states and Poland to signal decisive protection for NATO members.

“Say less and do more” is how one U.S. official puts it. That’s a simple recipe, and a correct one.

The key for Obama is to base policy on the fundamentals, where U.S. strength is overwhelming and the weakness of Russia (or any other potential adversary) is palpable. Just look at some numbers. The U.S. economy is growing solidly again, at an annual rate of roughly 2.6 percent, generating jobs and reducing public and private debt. A shale oil and gas boom has analysts talking about the United States as a new Saudi Arabia. Even the screwballs in Congress can’t derail the recovery.

Russia, in contrast, is a mess and getting worse. An April 30 report by the International Monetary Fund said Russia’s growth will slow to 0.2 percent this year from an anemic 1.3 percent in 2013. Capital outflows were \$51 billion in the first quarter. Russia’s economic strategy is based on energy, but “this growth framework has reached its limits,” says the IMF. “More integration with the world economy should help close the productivity gap with other countries, foster investment and

diversification, and enhance growth.” But that’s precisely what Putin is forfeiting with his reckless Ukraine policy.

Ukraine, in contrast to foundering Russia, has a new \$17 billion IMF loan, with plans for stabilizing its financial system, reducing corruption and ending dependence on Russian energy.

Stay the course, in other words. With sanctions, diplomatic pressure, NATO resolve. If Obama can hold the Western alliance together with these measured policies, the essential weakness of Putin’s position will be obvious in a few years. If Putin is foolish enough to invade Ukraine, he will face a protracted guerrilla war, city by city, as he moves toward Kiev.

The counter to Putin is strong, sustainable U.S. policy. To a battered Obama, three words: Suck it up.

Article 6.

The National Interest

Could the Ukraine Crisis Spark a World War?

Graham Allison

May 7, 2014 -- The rapid slide from lawlessness to violence that has claimed the lives of more than sixty people in the Ukrainian cities of Donetsk, Slovyansk, and Odessa in the past week

sounds alarms that should be heard more clearly in Western capitals. The strategy Washington and the Europeans have chosen that focuses on the villainization of Putin (much as he deserves it), calls on him to withdraw support for the separatists, and threatens further sanctions if he does not is bound to fail. It will not stop the killing. It will not prevent the de facto dismemberment of Ukraine. It will not deter Putin from continuing whatever role he and Russia are playing in this process. And it fails to address the risk that what happens in Ukraine does not end in Ukraine.

Mark Twain observed that while history never repeats itself, it does sometimes rhyme. In the combination of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the collapse of authority that is destabilizing Ukraine, can we hear echoes from a century earlier when the murder of an Austrian Archduke sparked a great European war?

The thought that what we are now witnessing in Ukraine could trigger a cascade of actions and reactions that end in war will strike most readers as fanciful. Fortunately, it is. But we should not forget that in May 1914, the possibility that the assassination of an Archduke could produce a world war seemed almost inconceivable. History teaches that unlikely, even unimaginable events do happen.

If those making fateful choices in Washington, Berlin, and Moscow today were to pause to reflect on what was done—and not done—in 1914, they would recognize that the current crisis poses much greater danger than they now imagine. This would stir them to think well beyond their current conceptions of events and to stretch to much bolder, preventative initiatives

than we have seen thus far.

The storyline of events 100 years ago is well known. Then, the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian imperial throne by Serbian terrorists led European elites (many of whom were cousins) to grieve. But for several weeks essentially nothing happened. Then, on July 23, Austria delivered an ultimatum to Serbia with ten demands. Serbia capitulated, agreeing to nine of the ten. But having secured a “blank check” of support from their German patron in the meantime, Austria rejected the Serbian reply, mobilized its forces, and declared war on Serbia. In response, the Russian Czar mobilized his forces. Kaiser Wilhelm then mobilized Germany’s military. Within a week, the major states of Europe had declared war against each other.

Could this sequence of events have been prevented? In the century since, historians have identified a number of opportunities. Most have focused on failures to recognize trend lines that were heightening risks that a spark would ignite a larger fire. But even after the assassination, it was still possible that statesmen could have acted to prevent what happened. One major opportunity occurred in the last week before war, as Luigi Albertini, one of the most insightful historians of these events, has explained. On July 28, when the Kaiser saw the Serbian response to Austria, he recognized that his Austrian client was out of control and sought to reign him in. He wrote to his foreign minister that this is “capitulation of the most humiliating kind, and as a result, every cause for war has gone.” The German Chancellor, however, failed to communicate this message clearly enough to stop the Austrians in their tracks. Two days later, when the Chancellor finally realized that events were driving to

a war Germany did not want, he sought an off-ramp. But by then Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the German General Staff, had concluded that the risks of Germany's not mobilizing were too great to bear. When he discovered that the Chancellor was chairing a meeting on July 30 to authorize a proposal to defuse the crisis, he crashed the meeting and stunned the Chancellor with the news that he had already obtained the Kaiser's approval for German mobilization to begin.

The framework for an agreement short of war that the Kaiser outlined on July 28, and the Chancellor embraced on July 30, was basically the same concept the British Foreign Minister Grey had been discussing several days earlier in London. Serbia would be required to destroy the Black Hand terrorist group that had assassinated the Archduke. To assure that it complied with this demand, Austrian troops would be allowed to occupy Belgrade until that was accomplished.

Had this plan been implemented, Austria's reasonable demand that Serbia be seriously punished for killing its heir apparently could have been satisfied. Russian concerns that its Orthodox brethren in the Balkans could remain independent would have been addressed. Germany would have had no need, or pretext, to respond to mobilizations in Russia and France, since they would not have occurred. Britain could have continued to play the role it had managed to play so skillfully for a century as the offshore balancer preventing the emergence of any dominant power on the continent. In the history books, this would be discussed as the third in a succession of Balkan crises that posed risks statesmen resolved.

At this point in the Ukrainian tragedy, the danger of a violent

outcome that will dismember Ukraine is rising rapidly. In last Thursday's phone call with Chancellor Merkel, Putin demanded that to defuse the crisis, the Ukrainian government withdraw its troops from southeastern regions. Defying that demand, Kiev sent its military to try to retake the rebel-controlled eastern Ukrainian city of Slovyansk.

The week ahead will see two decisive days of reckoning: May 9, when Russians commemorate the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany, and May 11, when pro-Russian separatists occupying government buildings in a dozen cities in eastern Ukraine will hold a referendum on independence. As Ukraine's interim prime minister said pointedly last week, the government of Ukraine faces a dilemma in which it is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't. In his words, "On the one hand, the majority of Ukrainians are pressing the acting president to bring these terrorists to justice. On the other hand, if you start this kind of very tough operation, you will definitely have civilian casualties. And this is the perfect excuse for Putin to say look, these ultranationalists kill Russian speaking people", giving him a pretext to send troops.

While a Russian emissary succeeded in freeing seven OSCE hostages last week as President Obama and Chancellor Merkel threatened further sanctions, both actions were more symbolic than of substance. Deeper factors driving events are in the saddle and riding toward a violent splintering of Ukraine. Unless U.S. and European leaders act in the week ahead, before Ukrainians vote for a new President on May 25, they will, de facto, have been partitioned. And even if the United States and Europe respond by imposing biting sanctions on sectors of the Russian economy—a big "if", given the interpenetration of the

Russian and German economies—facts on the ground will be no more reversible than Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Some hard-headed realists have argued that even if Ukraine shrinks with the loss of several autonomous republics (as Georgia did in 2008 when Abkhazia and South Ossetia seceded), the impact on American interests would be limited. They also argue that since it is now clear that no one (other than Russia) is prepared to fight for Ukraine, what is happening is unfortunate but not that important. What this complacency overlooks are potential secondary effects. Two deserve attention.

First, on the current track, the combination of Putin's actions and Western reactions will poison relations between Putin and Obama for the remainder of his two-and-a-half years in office. This is the critical period for what has been a promising prospect of a negotiated agreement that stops Iran verifiably (and interruptibly) short of a nuclear bomb. If an isolated Russian spoiler undermines the sanctions regime that has motivated Iranian interest in a negotiated solution, and Iran resumes or accelerates the nuclear program it was pursuing before the current pause, the United States and Israel will rapidly come to a crossroad. They will be forced to choose between seeing Iran acquire a nuclear bomb or bombing it to prevent that happening, igniting what is likely to become a wider war in the Middle East.

Second, think about the Baltics. Imagine a scenario in which we see a replay of Crimea or Donetsk in Latvia where one quarter of the population are ethnic Russians or Russian speakers. With or without Putin's encouragement, several hundred of them occupy government buildings in Riga; Latvian police and security services evict them in an operation that turns violent and leaves

as many corpses as last week's fire in Odessa; the occupiers call on Putin to honor his pledge to "defend the rights of compatriots." If the principles and precedent established by the Putin Doctrine lead to Russia's little green men without insignia entering Latvia in what threatens to become another creeping annexation, who will fight for Latvia?

The brute fact that Latvia is a member of the NATO alliance is hard to ignore. The United States and other members have solemnly pledged themselves to regard "an attack upon one as an attack upon all." But will German troops come to Latvia's rescue? And if they did, would a majority of Germans support that action? Would the French, or British? Would Americans?

If we do, we will cross a bright redline Republican and Democratic presidents assiduously avoided over four decades of Cold War: American and Russian troops would be killing each other. Any such conflict would raise risks of escalation in which each nuclear superpower remains capable of erasing the other from the map. But if we don't, we will see a precipitous collapse of the credibility of U.S. security guarantees that have been the central pillar of the international security architecture the United States has constructed since World War II. Not only European allies, but Japan, South Korea, and others who have staked their survival on a U.S. security umbrella will look to their own defense.

In highlighting downside dangers in the current drift of events in Ukraine, my argument is not that these are the most likely outcomes. If Putin thinks first about Russian national interests, he will have sufficient reason to cooperate in preventing Iran acquiring a nuclear bomb. From the perspective of Russian

national interests, acquiring additional territory in Eastern or Southern Ukraine and seeing the emergence of autonomous republics dependent on substantial financial support from Moscow is hardly a beneficial outcome for Russia. The overwhelming majority of Russians in the Baltics know that their lives are better as members of independent European states than they would be as provinces of Russia.

Nonetheless, especially in managing relations between great powers, and most especially, nuclear superpowers, American Cold War statesmen were vigilant in analyzing worst-case scenarios. Recognizing extreme risks (extremely unlikely, but extremely consequential), they observed what JFK, in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, called “primitive rules of prudence.” These accepted constraints and compromises in a competition in which the ultimate objective for each was to bury the other. Thus, Eisenhower refused to come to the rescue of Hungarian freedom fighters in 1956; LBJ to support the Prague uprising in 1968; and Reagan to deny overt support for Polish Solidarity and others as they loosened the Soviet grip on the Warsaw Pact.

If the likely outcome on the current path is unacceptable, or poses unacceptable risks, are there alternatives that, however ugly, are nonetheless preferable to what is otherwise likely to happen? I believe the answer is yes. Imagine an agreement in which all of the territory of Ukraine (minus Crimea) remains a sovereign, independent nonbloc state. In military and economic relations, Ukraine would agree with all the parties that it would remain neutral for the next quarter-century. It would thus not become a member of NATO or the European Union, nor of equivalent Russian-led institutions. Internally, it would make a

commitment to meet the highest EU standards for guaranteeing minority rights, including those of Russian speakers. And as an integral part of this package, all parties would also commit themselves to provide specific support for the new government of Ukraine as it attempts to build a viable state. For historical analogies, think Belgium in the nineteenth century, or Austria after World War II, or Finland.

Obviously, such an agreement could not be imposed on Ukraine. Its government will have to be a willing party to any resolution and convinced that it is preferable to its feasible alternatives. Realistic Ukrainians know, however, that Ukraine's survival as an independent political entity will prove impossible without Russian forbearance. Indeed, for the foreseeable future, Ukraine's economic viability will depend on Russian financial assistance (through below-market gas prices and delayed collection of outstanding debt for earlier deliveries), continuing exports of essential raw materials, and imports of Ukrainian products—all of which Russia can withhold at its own discretion.

Obviously, such an agreement would not be fair. But as JFK often observed, "life is unfair." Ukraine is free to choose between claiming all the rights and privileges of a normal modern state and ending up with half its current territory, or meeting enough of a Russian bully's demands to have a chance to survive with its current borders and, if it succeeds, to put Putin to shame.

An agreement requiring so much compromise by all parties will strike most readers as implausible—and is surely unlikely. Politically, the smart move for all the Western leaders is to focus

their fire on Putin, unquestionably a most deserving target. But for those of us who still believe that Ukraine can have a future, this week's decision by the IMF to release the first \$3 billion of a \$17 billion emergency rescue package to prevent the country from default and forestall economic collapse keeps hope alive. Despite the neo–Cold War divide with Russia on every other issue concerning Ukraine, the IMF was able to pull the package together quickly and win approval for it only because of cooperation from all the parties—including Putin's Russia.

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