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The Crisis in Ukraine

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The crisis in Ukraine is serious. At some point soon, reality needs to become the priority. No more name-calling. No more blaming. If there are any adults in the room, they need to stand up. The crisis in Ukraine is going critical, and that is a fact.

The first fact. The Ukraine has 15 nuclear reactors loaded with a 1000 tons or more of radioactive fuels. The largest nuclear reactor in Europe is on the Dneiper River, a little north of Crimea. Plus, there are the 4 Chernobyl reactors, still leaking radiation, still needing constant attention. A rational world cannot tolerate chaos, or a collapsed economy, or a civil war, or any kind of war, in a region with nuclear reactors. If the power grid fails, if workers are unable or unwilling to show up for their shifts, if there is an act of sabotage, an act of war, if something happens to a nuclear reactor, then the Ukraine, Europe, Russia, and the rest of the world will receive heavy doses of radioactive fallout. There is now no government in Ukraine with the resources to manage a nuclear catastrophe.

The second fact. The ability to start a war has now been distributed across hundreds of relatively low-ranked individuals, on both sides. NATO nations, including Canada, have moved military aircraft to front-line states and have begun armed missions along the Russian border. Russia has been matching these with deployments of interceptors and missile batteries along its borders and in Byelorussia. Accusations of border violations are already appearing. New NATO warships have entered the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea. The Ukraine and Russia have both moved military units to their border. Thus, there are now hundreds of armed and ready military personnel on both sides, any one of whom, for any reason, can cross a border, can shoot a missile, can start a war. In the Ukraine, large numbers of anti-Russia militia are eager to provoke Russia to invade Ukraine, and equal numbers of anti-Kiev militia are also eager to provoke Russia to invade Ukraine. War now waits on hair-triggers, hundreds of them. If an incident turns into a war, it would quickly turn into a missile war, and maybe into a global nuclear war.

In 2014, on the one century anniversary of World War I, European nations are again mobilizing for war. As in 1914, so in 2014, war is not for repelling an attack, but for loyalty to an alliance, even when some members of the alliance are belligerent. The 1914 war was supposed to be over by Christmas, but went on and on and on for years, killing 9 million people. The 2014 war, if it starts in earnest, will be over in one week, maybe less, and could kill a 100 million people depending on how many nuclear reactors break open and how many nuclear missiles are launched. The 1914 war was called “the war to end all wars”. The 2014 war will be that.

We need proposals that have some prospect of resolving the Ukraine Crisis. Here is my list:

1) Settle the Crimean secession. War is on the ready as long as NATO says the Crimean secession was an act of Russian aggression, and Russia says that it was an act of democratic self-determination. All sides, including the acting government in Kiev, should agree to a second referendum run by the electoral commissions of several small, non-aligned nations, for example, Switzerland, Ireland, and Costa Rica. If the referendum votes majority for secession, then the Ukraine, US, EU, and UN accept that act of democratic self-determination. If the referendum votes majority against secession, then Crimea reverts to its former status as an autonomous region of Ukraine, and Russia gets perpetual lease of its naval base modeled on the US lease of Guantanamo. All sides should accept a throw of the dice of democracy to decide the fate of Crimea.

2) Deploy non-aligned peace keeping troops. The acting government in Kiev is illegitimate in the eyes of many Ukrainians because it came to power by unconstitutional means and includes

right-wing neo-fascists who have publicly voiced violence against Russian-speaking Ukrainians. The methods of Maidan Square are now being copied in eastern cities. The acting government in Kiev has mobilized neo-nazi militia into national guard units, and has started conscripting western Ukrainians to join attacks on eastern Ukrainians. Demonstrators are being denounced and targeted as “terrorists”. Both sides are accusing the other of having foreign advisors and support. Neo-nazis from across Europe are reportedly coming to Ukraine to join in the mayhem. If this continues and escalates, then civil war is unavoidable. There is need for international, non-aligned military forces in eastern Ukraine and in Kiev, so that Ukrainian military units need not attack Ukrainian cities, so that citizens can feel secure, and so that militia can be disarmed. I suggest that Brazilian and Argentinian army units, wearing blue UN helmets, would be good. They are non-aligned nations far from the conflict, and the football reputations of those two nations might make their soldiers welcomed and accepted by Ukrainians. The costs of UN peace keeping troops would be paid by the US, EU, and Russia, in equal parts. Though expensive, it would be much cheaper than war.

3) Form an interim government of national unity. It may take months to organize national elections, perhaps delayed until a new national constitution can be written and approved. In the meantime, if the nation of Ukraine is to survive as one nation, then there is need for immediate representation and power in the government for all regions of the Ukraine. This could perhaps be achieved by empowering a “Council of Cities” comprised of representatives appointed by the elected mayors of the capitol cities of each of Ukraine’s 24 “oblasts” (provinces). Such a nationally representative council could be empowered as a “senate” in Kiev, or could be the pool from which ministers and deputy ministers of the government must be drawn. Without urgent action to include all of Ukraine in national decisions, especially military and economic decisions, then Ukraine might shatter and be unlikely to ever again exist as a coherent nation.

4) Grant immediate economic aid, without conditions. The Ukraine’s economy was poor and is now collapsing. The EU, US, and Russia, in equal parts, should implement an economic aid package to get the Ukraine through the next few months, until a legitimate government can be elected and accepted by all regions of Ukraine. The EU, US, and Russia should give preferential status to Ukrainian exports. The EU, US, and Russia should accept Ukrainian refugees, in approximately equal numbers, as long as ethnic attacks, anti-Semitism, and militia wars force Ukrainians to flee their home communities. Although such actions may seem expensive, they are far less expensive than war, especially war that risks nuclear reactor meltdowns and risks nuclear missile launches.

5) Investigate all oligarchs for financial crimes. The motivation for many of the original Maidan Square protesters was to rid Ukraine of corrupt government run by oligarchs, for oligarchs. The 2012 Transparency International Corruption Index ranked Ukraine as 144 out of 176 nations, tied with Syria and the Central African Republic. European and US financial crime units and tax authorities should investigate all Ukrainian oligarchs. All of them. Pro-European oligarchs, pro-Russian oligarchs, and ordinary gangster oligarchs. The acting government of Ukraine is again in the hand of oligarchs. For example, Igor Kolomoysky was given Dnepropetrovsk to govern, and Sergey Taruta was given Donetsk to govern. Both are billionaires. Even Arseniy Yatsenyuk, acting leader of Ukraine, has explained that he himself had €47,000 (\$65,000) of bank interest income. Presuming a high return of 3% interest, then he has around €16 million (\$23 million) in bank deposits. That is not counting real estate or other investments. How did a civil servant in a poor nation acquire that kind of wealth? Someone should inquire. All financial crimes, by any of the oligarchs, no matter what their positions of power or where they have stashed their cash, should be prosecuted. Stolen money and unpaid taxes should be recouped to Ukraine's national budget.

6) Investigate the Maidan Square snipers. The foreign minister of Estonia, Urmas Piet, after his trip to Kiev, reported to EU Foreign Policy Chief, Catherine Ashton, that "all the evidence shows, that people who were killed by snipers, from both sides, among policemen and people on the streets, that they were the same snipers, killing people from both sides." Ashton replied that this should be investigated, and Piet explained that the new government refuses to investigate this because it was members of the governing coalition who hired the snipers. To date, the EU has not investigated the snipers that caused the fall of a constitutional government, caused the rise of neo-fascists to positions of power, and caused the start of a civil war, maybe regional war, maybe global nuclear war. It is not a minor matter. If the NATO nations and their media truly believe that a government that shoots demonstrators is illegitimate, then the present government in Kiev is illegitimate if it came to power by shooting demonstrators. The Maidan murders are acts of political terrorism, and should be referred to the criminal court at The Hague, with support from national police forces to the degree possible.

7) Audit the \$5 billion spent by the US in Ukraine. Victoria Nuland, the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, has gone on record saying that the US has invested \$5 billion in NGO activities in Ukraine. That does look like covert operations to destabilize Ukraine and impose a new government, especially considering that the Ukraine was destabilized by demonstrations organized by NGOs and considering that it was the same Victoria Nuland who selected the new leadership in Ukraine. The US Government Accountability Office (GAO)

should do a public auditing of that money, reporting which NGOs got which amounts of money, under what authorization, disbursed by whom. Misappropriations and unlawful disbursements should result in criminal prosecutions.

The pieces of the Ukraine crisis all come from the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union 25 years ago: a) oligarchs controlling and corrupting the government, b) regions that are predominantly Russian-speaking, c) neo-fascists with a hatred of Russians and other minorities, and d) NATO nations investing in chances to imperil Russia. It will be difficult for Ukraine, EU, and Russia to escape horrific outcomes unless concerted actions are taken to change the course of events. People need to press their governments to start acting for the well-being of the region's societies, and stop acting out historical bad habits and loyalty to alliances.